



The Solano Historian

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Solano Historian

The *Solano Historian* is published twice yearly at Vallejo, California, by the Solano County Historical Society.

Edited by

**Matthew and Lee Fountain
and Robert Allgood.**

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The purpose of the *Solano Historian* is to stimulate the enjoyment and preservation of history by publishing pictures, stories, articles, and letters furnished by its readers. Much valuable material that would flesh out our knowledge of the past is lost each year because those who might save it either do not realize its value or lack the motivation to take any immediate action. The *Solano Historian* will supply the motivation by showing there is an appreciative audience for such material and that people are intensely interested in items relating to their own background, that jog their memory, remind them of memorable events, and satisfy their curiosity.

Readers who furnish material for publication will find they are amply rewarded by their own feeling of satisfaction and the recognition earned by their contribution.

The *Solano Historian* is now soliciting material of Solano and North Bay interest for future issues. More details concerning this may be obtained by contacting President Sue Lemmon or Lee Fountain. Comments on this issue are also welcome.

The Society does not assume responsibility for the accuracy of statements or opinions of contributions although every effort is made to be historically correct.

Solano County Historical Society
P. O. Box 922, Vallejo, CA 94590



President's Message

As the Solano County Historical Society starts another year, it is a good time to look back.

It was a good year for outgoing President Mary Higham and her fellow officers. The meetings were interesting, there was increased fellowship among the members, and best of all, two more issues of the *Solano Historian* were published. These preservations of stories of our past will become more valuable as time moves on, and we plan to gather and print more of them in the coming year.

Our Spring Trip to Mare Island was enjoyable; the weather was superb; it was a great day to walk through the old cemetery and meditate in St. Peter's Chapel.

We start this next year with a new President and Vice President, and continuing Secretaries and Treasurer whose experience and guidance will be most helpful. Our BIG goal this year is to get more members.

Bringing in more members is a job best done by individuals--in a one-on-one situation. We especially need to interest young people to become active in our Society. Each of you is encouraged to solicit new members. If you don't want to make the contact individually, give us names and WE'LL contact any likely candidates for membership.

It should be a good year with our Pioneer Day in September, the annual Christmas Party, and talented speakers for our general meetings. We look forward to seeing you in the months ahead.

Sue Lemmon President 1987-1988

Our Cover

The cover depicts the beautiful Green Valley Falls as viewed by the anonymous traveler of 1879, whose account of a pleasant trip through Green Valley appears in this issue.

About Our Authors

Charlene Erwin, a descendant of the famous Paladini-Dillingham sea-going family, wrote several articles for the Benicia Historical Society's "Benicia Sentinel" before her death in 1981. We are happy to reprint one of these charming pieces that relate personal memories of the great old ferries. Miss Erwin lived in the family home in Benicia and taught school in Vallejo for many years. A series of her articles will appear in the *Solano Historian*.

Lee Fountain, a retired Solano Community College instructor, has been a volunteer at the Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum since its inception and a longtime Solano County Historical Society worker.

Matthew Fountain, a retired research chemist, is treasurer of Solano County Historical Society. He turned writer when he found historical anecdotes among the county's treasures.

M.C. Low is librarian at Solano Community College and a historian on the side. He is doing primary field research on the history of early Green Valley and Suisun Valley. He is chairman of the Solano County Historical Roundtable.

Ernest Wichels is Solano County's best known historian. He has co-authored two books with Sue Lemmon and has written the history column in the *Times Herald* for many years. His specialty is all-encompassing--Mare Island and Napa-Solano History.

Anonymous--the article "Green Valley" was first published by the *Weekly Solano Republican* on April 10, 1879.

Green Valley

The following article was printed in the Weekly Solano Republican, published in Suisun on Thursday, April 10, 1879. The anonymous author describes his walk through Green Valley as he visited the homes and farms along the way.

Bridgeport

Last Friday morning we boarded the west bound train and were whirled along through green fields and past blooming orchards for a few miles, and after a short ride arrived at Bridgeport, the metropolis of Green Valley. We found the town very quiet, and the monotonous hum-drum of every day life with scarce a ripple on its surface.

We called upon the efficient Postmaster, Mr. Humphreys, and found him the genial gentleman he is so widely noted as being. He has on hand a fine stock of general merchandise.

Next door is the boot and shoe making establishment of Jas. Turner. He was busily "pegging away" and as he is the only shoemaker in the town, doubtless does a good business.

Next place of business is the meat market of H. Bihler. Mr. Bihler has been engaged in this business for over 35 years, hence knows just how it is done. We should judge from appearances that he does quite an extensive business.

In the same building is a saloon under the management of Al Wood, where the thirsty wayfarer may rest and refresh himself.

Next comes the general merchandise establishment of Behrmeister & Siebe. These two gentlemen were too busy with their customers to talk much; but we noticed they carried a very nice stock of goods, and are evidently thriving.

Lastly on the north side of the block is a nicely fitted up saloon. We have unfortunately forgotten the name of the proprietors.

W.J. Jewell, an old-time friend in Rio Vista, is Station and Wells', Fargo & Co.'s Agent, also telegraph operator. He was chock full of business, and keeps things in apple pie order.

Phillip J. Doll has opened a barber shop and confectionery store. He is a pleasant little gentleman, and we hope he will succeed in his enterprise.

J.G. Valentine is just opening a carriage and wagon painting establishment. he will doubtless be kept busy, as he appears to be a tip top workman.

The saws and planer in W.W. Mason's

box factory were buzzing at a fearful rate, and Mr. Mason has his hands full of business. He has a blacksmith shop connected with his business.

L. Eber has a blacksmith shop, and seems to be full of business. He is a pleasant gentleman.

Ed. Gerow is busily engaged in Mr. Eber's shop in perfecting an original device in the way of a patent double-trees. Instead of placing the double-trees in the usual position behind the horses, these are suspended from the back bands of the harness, and the traces are short rods of iron extending from the hames to the clips of the single trees. It is claimed that by this arrangement a man can plow as close as he chooses to his trees and not injure them; also that he can plow grape vines and not touch them. These double-trees will prove of great service to persons using derrick forks, as the double-trees will always be suspended, and never bother the horses heels. It will be found useful on street cars also, as it will do away with a tongue altogether.

Jas. Crowley is the proprietor of a saloon and boardinghouse, and everything around him looks neat and tidy. Mrs. C.J. Pitman is the proprietor of the Bridgeport Hotel.

She keeps an excellent house, and we tried the merits of her tables, and can vouch for them.

Green Valley

Refusing the kindly offer of a horse and

buggy, we preferred to take a tramp up the valley.

Just as we leave town we pass the school house. The school is at present under the management of Mr. Jamison and Miss Lula Owens.

As we trudge along up the road, the valley begins to open to our view, and we soon have in perspection a perfect paradise.

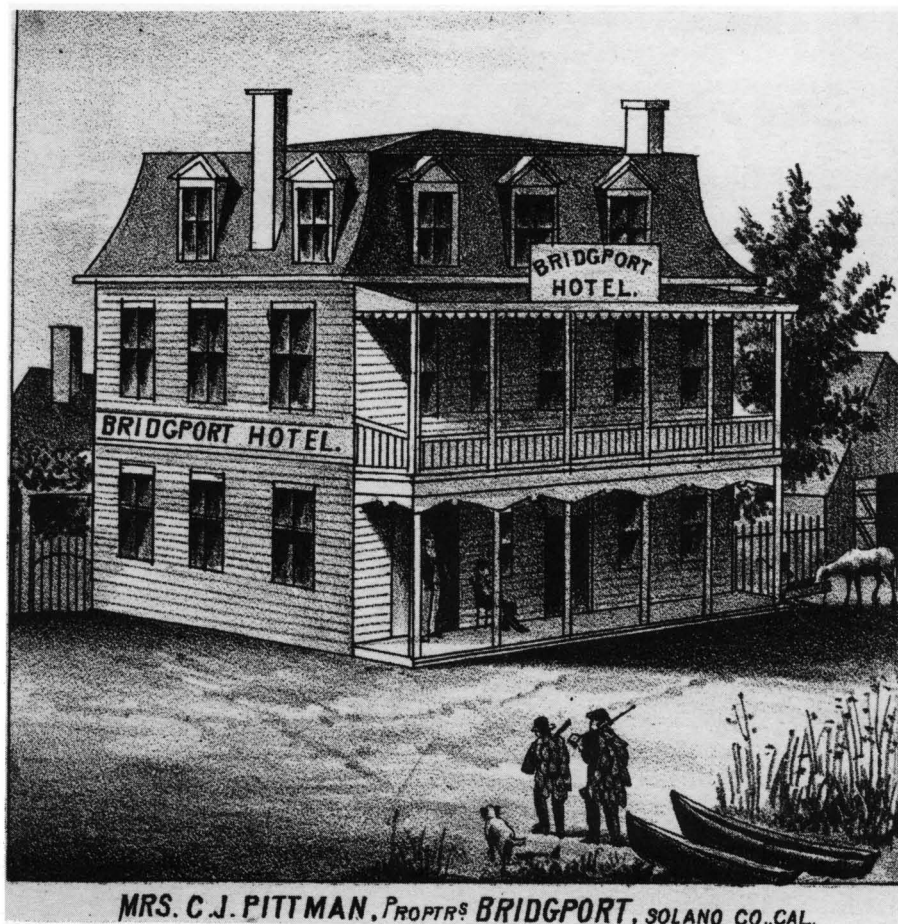
The first house we came to is occupied by John Mayhood. He has a small tract of land well under cultivation. Next is the farm of Mr. Lynch. He has a neatly painted house, and a well cultivated farm.

North of this place is a tract of the Ramsey estate, rented by Mr. Herbison. He is engaged chiefly in growing grain and corn. He has a fine field of wheat.

In the first house on the east side of the road lives G.M. Berry. The house is on Capt. C.E. Shillaber's place.

Further to the eastward is the residence of Captain S. His farm consists of 180 acres, nicely situated, with part of it fitted up only for pasture and the balance rich valley land. He has 10,000 grape vines set out and is preparing the ground to plant 10,000 Eucalyptus trees. He has a curiosity, of which he is justly proud, in the way of a barberry hedge, around the house and barn. It is probably the most extensive hedge of the kind in the State.

The next place is the estate of C. Ramsey. This farm contains 1,000 acres of very fine land. There is a large and



MRS. C. J. PITMAN, PROPTR BRIDGEPORT, SOLANO CO. CAL.



elegant stone mansion on it erected in 1860. There is a great profusion of trees, flowers, shrubs and vines growing around the house, giving it a most beautiful sequestered appearance.

Crossing over the valley to the west side we pass the residence of Isaac Crow. This gentleman has 160 acres and grows principally grain. He has a fine lot of stock hogs on hand, which will doubtless yield him a handsome return this fall.

On the west side of the valley lies the ranch of Geo. Mason. He has 156 acres, all in good cultivation; also quite a large vineyard.

Passing up the valley on the west side, the next place is owned by James Capell. He has 254 acres. We noticed a fine, young vineyard on his place, also an extensive one of older growth.

North of him lies the extensive vineyard of F.S. Jones. It was now getting dark and Mr. Jones kindly took us in out of the wet for the night, and to say the we enjoyed his kind hospitality after the day's tramp but poorly expresses our keen appreciation of it.

He has 307 acres of beautiful land. He has a large and substantial stone house nestled among huge over-hanging oaks on the side of the mountain. His wine cellar is perhaps the largest in the valley. It has a capacity of about 30,000 gallons. There are sixteen casks in it which will hold on an average of 1,000 gallons. He has a still connected with his cellar, where he makes an excellent quality of brandy. There are

106,000 vines on the place and of this number 1,500 were not out this year. This vineyard produces about 250 tons of grapes, which will yield about 35,000 gallons of wine.

After bidding Mr. Jones good-bye we started for a tramp up the canyon to Green Valley Falls.

The morning was breezy and damp and the grass and the bushes dripping wet. For a while the road was very good. It then became a wide path, then a sheep trail, then a forest of dripping chaparral, and as we floundered around it we almost fancied we were in the river up to our shoulders. shoulders.

At last we spied a little shanty away down on the bank of the stream and good road beyond. We descended the hill as best we could. The house was vacant. We then started up the road. The wheel tracks soon vanished and at last it became simply a trail, and we were beginning to lose all hopes of reaching the falls.

Just then we spied the familiar form of Marion Stilts down on the bank of the stream trolling for trout. From him we learned that the falls were near at hand, and a few minutes' walk brought us to where we could see the water shimmering down the facade of the solid wall of the mountain.

We then saw that we were more than-paid the trouble. We have seen many falls from the grand, stupendous Niagara on down through the various grades, but seldom have we seem so small a fall so

beautifully located and surrounded by such picturesque scenery. Space forbids an extended description of it. It is enough to say that it is a sight well worth going to see.

Coming again out into the valley we came to the Beauferton Ranch now owned by some Italians. This ranch is almost devoted to viniculture and is beautifully located.

Passing on up we came to the "Belle Vista" vineyard owned by Votypki and son. There are 380 acres in the farm, of which 36 acres in vine, which yield about 140 tons of grapes. These gentlemen have quite a large wine cellar, and some very choice wines stored therein. The cellar will store about 20,000 gallons. These gentlemen ship most of their wines to Milwaukee, Wis. They shipped several cases this year to Hamburg, Germany.

The view of the valley from this place is unexcelled. Looking down over the fields of growing grains one realizes to the fullest extent the adaptness of the "Green Valley." For miles the eyes meet a mass of living green. Then comes a belt of amber-colored tules belting the bay, then a strip of the blue waters of Suisun Bay and the vista is walled in by the huge proportion of Mount Diablo.

On our return trip we passed over to the eastern side of the valley and came to the ranch of Geo. Cook. Mr. Cook has fine improvements on the place, and in time will have a beautiful place. He has 850 acres, on which he grows some grain, and cuts large quantities of wood yearly.



Green Valley School House at north edge of Cordelia

Further down the valley is the ranch of H. Brown. He has 44 acres in the highest state of cultivation. Vines and orchards occupy the most of it. He has a wine cellar which will contain 25,000 gallons of wine. He made 6,000 gallons last year.

Passing on down the valley we pass the ranch of Mr. Meister. A fine row of almond trees are planted along the road.

Further down we came to the old mill. The walls were built of stone. The wood-work and interior burned out some years, and it now stands like some ruined castle of a bygone generation. Mr. Curtis Wilson has just purchased the property and will make it a beautiful place in a few years.

Passing down on the valley we next came to the Durbin tract, owned by W.P. Durbin and sons. There are 1,000 acres in the tract, which lies in the very heart of the valley. There is a large vineyard on it containing 20,000 vines. There is also a fine, large orchard of almond and cherry trees.

We were shown a fine horse here owned by S.P. Barbin. "Bob Woodward" is a fine, beautiful iron gray horse of good pedigree. He was sired by Eugene Callery; dam a Shakespeare mare.

The next place is P. Stilts'. J.J. Finley is conducting it now. It is a fine farm devoted to grain-raising, orchard and vineyard.

This ends our tramp. The crops throughout the valley are looking fine and the prospects are good for a bountiful harvest. Our time was spent most pleasantly, and we found the people of the valley very sociable and pleasant.

—CORDELIA—

Shaving Parlor

A. H. KLAHN, Proprietor

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WARNING To Hunters!

Any person found hunting on any of our land will be prosecuted without further notice.

W. & L. PIERCE.

Ads from Cordelia X Ray, 1898

The Legislature in Vallejo

by Lee Fountain

The often told story of the early years of California's nomadic legislature has usually emphasized the sensational aspects of its travail, has sometimes cited a mere calendar of events, and has almost always dismissed the several sessions as the meanderings of a group of discontented, disgruntled, and self-seeking law-makers. Little has been written of the awesome tasks these neophyte legislators faced, tasks which demanded concentration and objectivity, qualities hard to come by under even the best of circumstances.

Under the primitive conditions of the early capitals, the law makers found it almost impossible to work. It is true liquor or the lack of it may have played a part in some of their decisions; it is undoubtedly true the men were very concerned about their own comfort; and it is true no northern California city offered them a suitable capital nor the amenities that were found in the state buildings in the Atlantic seaboard states from which they had come. But these men from the mines, ranchos, sea lanes, general merchandise stores, and fledgling newspapers needed all the help they could muster in order to establish a legal government so far removed from its supporting sister states or the federal government which had procrastinated in defining its relationship to its newest member.

Monterey was probably the logical choice as a capital for it was almost in the center of the state; it had a good harbor; the climate was almost ideal, and it had been the official headquarters of the Spanish, Mexican and United States military governors from 1770 to 1849.

However, the new government, feeling its authority for the first time, wanted none of the old Hispanic influence nor the ambience of its previous heritage. The aggressive Yankee entrepreneurs, merchants, and farmers wanted to have their government in a city of their own choice. They wished the capital closer to the hub of the mining activities, the new center of population, and the deep water transportation of San Francisco Bay and the river delta of the Sacramento and the San Joaquin.

After the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States military authority was centered in Monterey at the old presidio. A succession of five military governors in three years--Sloat, Stockton, Kearney, Mason, Smith, and finally Riley--tried

their hands at running the new territory until the United States could get around to supplying a civil authority. But distance and tradition made the temporary solution distasteful to the fast growing and independent colony; so on his own General Riley issued orders for a constitutional convention to create a territorial or state legal system.

The men who gathered in Monterey at Riley's request in 1849 had the patterns of the constitutions of the other states to follow. With dedication and hard work, a reasonable document was forged that functioned in a more or less adequate manner until 1878 when a second constitution was written. Its greatest weakness was the ambiguous wording concerning a permanent state capital and this became the source for the wandering capital.

When their work was finished, the forty-eight delegates scattered to their individual responsibilities at business, mine, farm or profession and most made no attempt to run for the elective offices they had so recently created. The booming enterprises, the rich veins of gold, the great unexplored territory were all too attractive to permit many of these eager men to discipline themselves to the tedious and thankless work of changing a constitution into a government, especially of trying to integrate conflicting state and federal claims and responsibilities.

One of the problems the constitutional delegates attempted to solve was the choice of a city in which to establish a capital. Many communities were aware of the great advantage it would be to have the capital, and all kinds of overtures and offers were made to the delegates. Some offered free land or free buildings; others, more cautious, offered vague property at reasonable prices. However, the promoters of San Jose got there first with the most persuasive campaign and the delegates accepted Pueblo San Jose for a capital.

The first session of the legislature met in San Jose on December 15, 1849, and worked until adjournment on April 22, 1850. After only one day in session, one legislator offered a resolution to move the capital back to Monterey. The miserable weather, the deep mud, inadequate capitol building, and poor transportation seemed overpowering. The problems that plagued this first session continued to follow subsequent sessions until 1854, and even then, at the end of their wanderings, their selection of Sacramento was based more on negative factors of other cities than on the positive or logical qualities of Sacramento. Of course, the political antics of the unscrupulous lobbyists played a significant part.

During the entire time in San Jose offers poured in to change the site of the capital. It was the generous offer of General Mariano G. Vallejo that was finally accepted because it exceeded any others.

"His offer was fabulous; 156 acres of land facing San Pablo Bay; \$370,000 within two years for public buildings, including a capitol that would cost \$125,000; other public buildings, a state university, botanical gardens, schools, hospitals, asylums; and a state penitentiary."

Since a roving capital had been the pattern for the Mexican regime,--San Diego, Los Angeles, and Monterey had all served as capitals at the discretion of the military governors--it did not seem too significant to continue the impermanence.

The controlling factor in choosing a new site was money. The infant state, while potentially wealthy, had few immediate resources. The first session had sold bonds and levied real and personal taxes. But already the state was in debt and the taxes so recently laid could not be spared for real estate or property.

The citizens of California voted to accept General Vallejo's offer on October 7, 1850. Following the dictate of the populace Governor McDougal signed the legal document that accepted the Vallejo offer on February 4, 1851. It is inconceivable that these early lawmakers could actually have believed that such a magnificent gift made in good faith could become a reality, especially in the nebulous time frame suggested. But the reality of the primitive environment in Pueblo San Jose made any promise of a highly respected citizen such as General Vallejo look good. Regardless of the desire to have pleasant working and living quarters, these law makers were aware of the shortage of materials and laborers everywhere. There wasn't even a village where the proposed new capital was to materialize. Everything had to be brought in. Not only the capitol had to be built but also living quarters and service agencies like laundries, bath houses, barber shops, and stores to support the governmental activities had to be created. Although General Vallejo was held in high regard by most California residents, his wealth and previous achievements could not cause an instant city to materialize. Aware that this actually could not happen between the adjournment of one session of the legislature and the beginning of another, the legislators watched what actually was happening and they knew what to expect when the third session of the legislature convened. If they didn't know, it was not the fault of the *Alta California*, a San Francisco newspaper that reported regularly on the status of the emerging

government. The editorial policy of the paper clearly and persistently said the capital should never have been put in Vallejo.

Eight months after the offer of General Vallejo was accepted the following article appeared in the October 14, 1851, issue of *Alta California*.

"What can be said for California, to extenuate the fact that she has no seat of government at all. Or, that her people, after having been seduced into the folly of voting to locate a city where God never intended--a capital where sensible, considerate men free from all expectation of personal aggrandizement could never have found a reason should not now know where the capital is, or if it is? Or, that after one Legislature has definitely fixed the seat of government, the next should be in as great doubt how or where to find it. . . Or, that the probabilities are now, that while the next Legislature will meet at some unknown spot near Napa creek, yclept Vallejo, the Governor will be at the capital he has made by his proclamation--San Jose.

This paper opposed from the beginning the wild and speculating project of building a city where none existed, none was needed; a capital where it must lie under all the disadvantages which could be urged against other places, but enjoying none of the advantages which they possessed."

Another typical article appeared three weeks later.

"Where shall the Legislature Meet?

One of the most stupendous follies of which the last Legislature was guilty was the removal of the capital from the city of San Jose to the Rancho of Vallejo; . . . The act under which the capital was removed was based upon certain obligations entered into by and between Don Mariano G. Vallejo and John McDougal, Governor the State. The law reads thus:

"1. That from and after the present session of the Legislature, the city of Vallejo, situated upon the bay of Napa and the Straits of Carquinez, shall be the permanent seat of Government for the State of California provided, that the said M. G. Vallejo shall provide for the space of three years a State House and other offices of State equal or better than those now occupied, without expense to the state, &c, &c, &c.

Now, the import of the foregoing language would seem to be that the capital was removed to Vallejo immediately upon the adjournment of the Legislature.

yet such was not the fact, so far as the public offices and officers were concerned. Nor could the legislature have so intended to be understood; and yet they say in a law, that Vallejo shall be the State capital from and after the close of their then session, knowing as they well did that there were no accommodations there for public offices or officers! Nor did they make any provision for removing the archives, or give authority to any one to remove them."

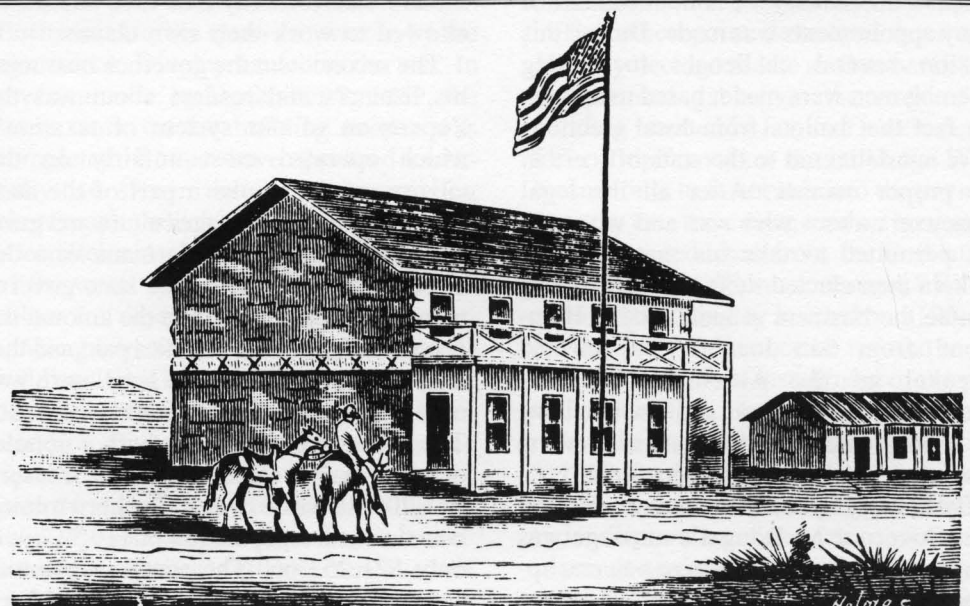
The articles or editorials--the line is not clearly drawn between the two in the newspapers of the mid-nineteenth century--continue during December to voice dissatisfaction with the choice of Vallejo.

"In the state of things, the Governor, under such assurances, or upon such information, as he deemed satisfactory, assumed the responsibility of removing the Government effects and officers to Vallejo, in June last. In so far as we can perceive, although Vallejo was in reality the capital from the day of the Legislature's adjournment, yet this act of the Governor appears to have been one of entire individual responsibility; but it was, we presume, performed in good faith, and may, by a long stretch, be said sanctioned by the spirit of the law.

Well, the archives were removed, and Vallejo became in every respect the capital of the State. But in September it was found that the state house and public offices were not sufficiently complete to preserve the public record or accommodate the public business, and the Governor again took the responsibility of removing the valuables of the state back to the city of San Jose. Now, clearly the Governor had no power to do this. . . ."

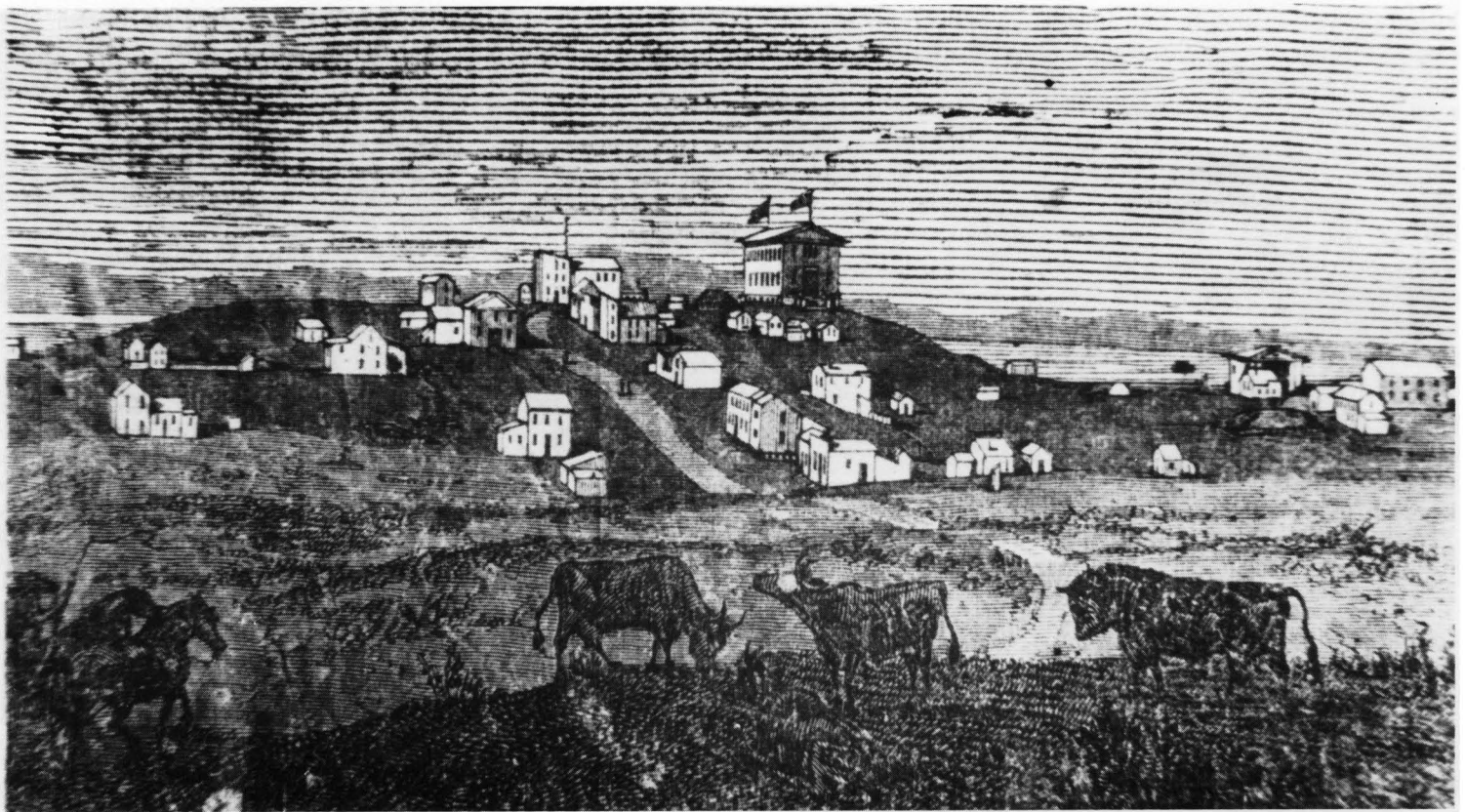
With the *Picayune* and *Alta California* editorializing constantly about the unsuitability of Vallejo as capital and the confusion of the law regarding the immediate removal from San Jose, the legislators were being conditioned to expect the worst. When the steamer *Empire* docked in Vallejo some fifty lawmakers were on board among the over two hundred passengers. One must assume the bulk of these were lobbyists, opportunists, and political hangers-on since there was nothing in the village other than the capitol.

The Senate and Assembly met in Valle-



Engraved by Charles H. Holmes, of Sacramento, in 1888; copied from an old print in an early California magazine.

Capitol at San Jose--1849-1851.



When Vallejo's Capitol was first built, few of the buildings shown in this early drawing existed.

jo first on Monday, January 5, 1852. The first day in the partially finished and furnished capitol was filled with the ordinary business of beginning. The Hon. W. S. Sherwood, Judge of the Ninth Judicial District, administered the oath of office to the members. A Mr. Wall of Monterey presented a signed petition protesting meeting in Vallejo. After the petition was read, it was "laid on the table," a tactic followed many times in the next two years.

The following day no quorum was present so there were no sessions, but obviously business was being conducted because on January 7, announcement of many appointments was made. During this session several challenges to seating assemblymen were made, based mainly on the fact that ballots from local elections were not delivered to the state officers in the proper manner. After all the legal maneuvers about who was and who was not permitted to take his seat, the law makers then elected their own officers to handle the business at hand. R. P. Hammond from San Joaquin was elected Speaker of the Assembly, Blanton McAlpine, Chief Clerk, and a whole bevy of subordinates from Assistant Clerk to Assistant Page was given positions.

By January 8, the Houses were notified that Governor McDougal's message was ready, and from this message one can appreciate the momentous task that faced the law makers, for the message did contain the problems that had to be tackled in order

to bring California in line with the other states.

The first problem Governor McDougal discussed was the fact California had been admitted to the Union as a free state, thus quieting for awhile the severe tensions between the North and the South. The chief executive warned that being a free state did not solve the problem; California had many Southerners and southern sympathizers, but the federal laws concerning runaway slaves and free black men had to be scrupulously followed. Fear of slaves as workers in the mines bothered the miners who felt only free men should be allowed to work their own claims.

The second item the governor instructed his listeners and readers about was the "operation of our system of taxation" which operated most unfairly on the citizens of the southern part of the state which was essentially agriculture and grazing. The southern Californians who derived little benefit from the state government said they paid double the amount the people in the mining counties paid and that their representation in the legislature was only one third of what the northerners had. The six southern counties with a population of 6,367 paid into the treasury \$41,705.26 while twelve northern mining counties with a population of 119,917 paid only \$21,253.66. The southern counties had twelve representatives and the northern mining counties had forty-four. Making matters worse was the fact that the capita-

tion tax was easily ignored in the mining counties who had paid only \$3,580 after being assessed \$51,495.00 while the southern counties had paid \$3,903.50 against an assessment of \$7,205.00. Tax revenues showed all the agricultural counties with a population of 79,778 paid into the treasury \$246,247 while the mining counties with a population of 119,917 paid only \$21,253.66. Southern counties had held meetings and were attempting to organize to present their side. Many southerners had to sell some of their land to pay their taxes. It was obvious something had to be done to keep peace within the state and right an obvious wrong.

The establishment of an educational system was a paramount need, the governor continued. Elementary education before statehood had been in the hands of the family or the church. By 1852 academies and a university system as well as common schools had to be established. Many of the legislators had left their families in the East where children could be educated or the children had been sent back to relatives to live while they went to school. As a result these men were eager to see their communities with good schools. Also they felt that the right kind of immigrants would come to their communities if there were good schools.

Another serious problem, according to Governor McDougal, was the judicial system. The number of judicial districts

needed to be cut in half. Fewer and larger districts would save a great deal of money. The complete legal system must be clarified, codified, and simplified.

A most unusual request came next from the governor. It concerned the Fremont Battalion. Fremont was a part of the Bear Flag rebellion and had, according to him, saved California for the United States. All the state below Sonoma fell away from the Mexican government just by the mere presence of Fremont and his men. Also the English were deterred from seizing the state by the threat of Fremont. The federal government had refused to pay the fair-haired captain's expenses for his sojourn in California because no state of war existed with Mexico in 1846 nor with England. California friends were shocked at the "ingratitude of the nation" and turned to the legislature for the payment or for pressure to obtain payment from Congress.

The threat of intervention by the federal government in the regulating and controlling the mines was ever present and needed to be guarded against. The mines had been carefully kept free of any regulation and the miners meant to keep it that way.

Another problem the governor worried the law makers with was the unsavory immigrants coming from the penal colonies of foreign countries, especially England. Now that California was a state, the population was terribly concerned about what new citizens should be admitted. This concern also related to the disposition of the native population. Several Indian uprisings had taken place since the last legislature had met. The governor, expressing his own deep-felt convictions, suggested it might be wise to follow the course President Jackson had recommended - remove all Indians from the state because controlling them would be a continuing expense. Under any circumstance, the natives should be completely isolated from the white man, McDougal urged. Actually there were probably more Indians than white men at this point.

One way the federal government was unfair to its newest member was the unequal postage rates charged. Californians had to pay twice as much as for the "transition of mails" as did citizens of other states, the governor added.

Another problem that the chief executive insisted must be worked out with the federal government was the establishment of lighthouses, buoys, and dry docks. Especially acute was the lack of a federal mint. In its short existence as a state over \$200,000,000 in gold had been carried away from the state. Also, no legal place had been established for either federal or

state arms or ammunition. In order to satisfy federal requirements for members of Congress, the state had to be divided into Congressional districts and dates of elections had to be changed to permit California to be represented at all times.

After all the problems with the federal government were discussed, the governor continued with more local concerns. He wanted the legislators to review all the laws that fettered commerce and the laws that heavily taxed commerce and navigation. If California business were to prosper and be able to compete these laws needed revision.

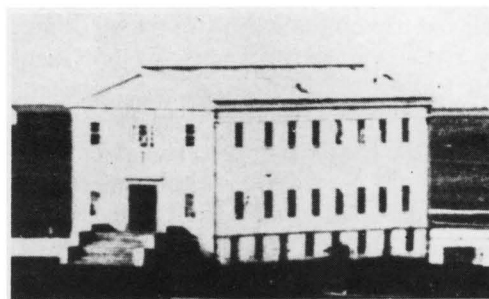
The most pressing state problem the governor finally presented came as a warning to the legislators. They had to find ways and means to pay government expenses, retire the bonds with their punitive three per cent interest. Also in the realm of finance McDougal asked the legislature to negotiate with the federal government for monies collected by the military government before California became a state. While withholding territorial status or statehood, the United States Congress levied taxes on the citizens--actually taxing without permitting representation. Now the governor was asking the federal government to remit some if not all the illegally collected money the state so badly needed.

In addition to these problems that Governor McDougal requested the legislature to solve or attempt to, he closed by saying that he knew the law makers should be taking care of the problems of their own particular districts.

Faced with the tasks of developing a tax system that was fair, establishing an educational system from grades 1--through graduate school, revising a cumbersome judicial system, deporting some 200,000 Indians to some remote area, and negotiating with the U.S. Congress concerning its negligent treatment of California, these legislators answered by having the address printed and distributed--3,000 copies printed in English and 1,000 in Spanish. Bilingualism seemed to be no problem to them.

At this point Governor McDougal resigned and John Bigler who had been elected in September was inaugurated as governor. The law makers were recipients of an inaugural address, but this time instead of problems there were platitudes and rhetoric of a characteristic kind.

One piece of business, the vote to permit the State Supreme Court to hold its present session in San Francisco, was followed by another,--to direct the treasurer "to make no further payments out of the General Fund until the archives are



Vallejo Capitol Years Later

brought to the place where the Legislature is in session." This act, transporting the archives from place to place, later became one of the most irritating and expensive factors in the whole political fracas. Then the motions to move to Sacramento or San Jose began. Between resolutions to adjourn to some far off place and resolutions stating Vallejo was the legal capital, representatives gave notice of bills they intended to present and argued over some on second and third reading. Sixteen standing committees were appointed although there were no rooms in which they could meet.

The *Journal of the Third Session of the California Legislature* succinctly reports bills requesting money for service in the state against the Indians and a bill to organize a militia. Then appears a surprise resolution. "Resolved: that the Sergeant-at Arms of the House be directed to deliver to the city authorities of Sacramento, the stationery to be transferred to Sacramento for use of the House of Assembly."

Regardless of the dissatisfaction with both governmental and personal accommodations, the law makers remained uneasy about changing the location of the legal capital. Several resolutions were made to move the capital to Sacramento, to Stockton, even to San Francisco, but they ended up being "laid on the table" or being referred to the second house for confirmation. Even one resolution left vacant the place and the date--just the resolutions to move!

However, the following message was finally received by the Assembly from A.C. Bradford, Secretary of State.

"I am instructed by the Senate to inform the House that they have concurred in the resolution that the Legislature adjourn from this place to meet in the city of Sacramento, on January 13th, 1852, at 12 o'clock, M., with this amendment, by inserting the 16th January, instead of the 13th."

Thus a second time the weather, the mud, and the poor facilities drove the law makers to seek better quarters, this time to the second largest city in the state. One of the great attractions was the promise of a great ball in Sacramento and the happy,

relaxed trip on the spacious steamer going up river. The senators and assemblymen left feeling Vallejo was the legal capital, but they didn't feel obligated to meet there under the circumstances. But even this change did not solve the problems of the law makers. Mud they lived with in San Jose and Vallejo, but the flood waters of the Sacramento River proved more disastrous and eventually forced the legislators back to Vallejo for the fourth session in January 1853.

However, after a seven months absence they found few improvements had been made. The capitol had been furnished but there were still no committee rooms nor adequate offices for state officers.

Governor Bigler's address to the fourth session revealed his lack of sympathy with the state constitution because he asked there be biennial legislative sessions rather than annual ones, that the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction be eliminated, that the office of the Superintendent of Public Buildings be eliminated, that the office of State Prison Inspectors be eliminated. He also suggested that the legislators reduce their salaries from \$16 a day to \$12 a day, but that they be paid in gold or silver, not script. This would help them actually, because they had been paid in script, which had been redeemed at 40 to 50 cents on the dollar but they had to pay state taxes in gold or silver.

As with Governor McDougal, Bigler was unhappy with the federal government. He complained about inadequate federal troops for defense and he pointed out that when other states were admitted to the Union the U.S. Congress donated lands for schools, universities, and seminaries, but in California this had not happened. He considered this a major problem for the legislature to undertake.

After considering all these serious and really significant problems on January 10, these busy men adjourned to celebrate in honor of the Battle of New Orleans, fought some thirty-eight years previously.

By January 11 the law-makers were again considering resolutions to move to Sacramento, to remain in Vallejo or even to go to Benicia where a fine brick city hall was available to them.

They did pass a bill to attach "Signor or Mare Island" to Solano County and had first and second readings about the cost of the state prison arrangements; mail routes were established; the duties of sheriffs were detailed; and bills concerning the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the revision of the Courts of Justice were being discussed.

Actually the legislators were at work on



This Sacramento flood of 1850 was less devastating than the flood of 1852.

the local problems that faced them most frequently. Their immediate concerns were being considered--how much to pay civil servants, how to administer justice economically and fairly, the rights and duties of law officers, the state of the Marine Hospital in San Francisco, the protection of the rights of miners and their operators. Always finances were of deep concern.

Finally on January 19 a committee was formed to meet with General Vallejo to see if it would be feasible or possible for him to live up to his commitment to establish a state capital with its satellite buildings and establishments he had promised. McDougal had signed the bill making Vallejo the state capital on February 4, 1851 and the third session of the legislature met there January 5, 1852. In that short time the building of a capital was impossible. Even with another year--January 5, 1853, not much could be expected as far as a city was concerned. Even though most of the representatives came from quite primitive living conditions, a city the size of Sacramento, which was only fourteen years old, seemed more appropriate than the barren hills on the north side of the Carquinez Strait.

On January 24 the committee had conferred with General Vallejo who had asked to be released from his bond. He stated that his plan had been jeopardized by the number of times the state archives had been moved to and from Vallejo. He and his associates were unable to come up with the money he had felt certain he could supply three years previously. The state was willing to cancel the bond if the General would not sue the state for its share in the unfinished bargain. Governor Bigler, a Sacramento man who never gave up effort to get the capital for Sacramento, demanded the buildings totaling \$370,000 that the General had originally offered. The time frame mentioned casually was

two or three years. A state capitol did materialize but the rest of the project remained a dream. Had that building been adequate and a semblance of adequate housing and services been available, perhaps the government might have been patient while the other buildings slowly emerged. However, the Yankee impatience for getting on with the project ruled the actions of legislators, urged on by the lobbyists constantly luring them with the treasure and pleasures of other shores. Any worldly wise man knew that any such scheme as presented by the honorable general could not happen even in a decade.

While the contract between General Vallejo and the state was being dissolved, the legislators continued to struggle with the decision concerning a new choice for a home. They took one moment out to express their philosophy of government by sending a message to the French government on the accession of Louis Napoleon to the throne. The message read "We regret the downfall of republicanism and can only view him as an enemy to France and republican institutions." It was easier to dabble in foreign policy than to clarify domestic issues. They also were contemplating sending a commission to China.

After struggling with the ponderous problems of establishing a state government, with the pressures of aggressive self-seeking politicians, and with the complex finances of an infant state, these harassed legislators packed up again on February 4, 1853, and moved to Benicia where a fine brick city hall was made available for the law makers, and boarding houses were more numerous. When they arrived, they discovered the boarding houses already filled to capacity. Sacramento promoters two days earlier had sent two hundred men to Benicia to overtax Benicia's facilities.

The Incredible Train Ferry--Solano

by Charlene Erwin

One of the greatest ferryboats of all times played a "stellar role" in the drama of America's Transportation History right here upon our own Strait waters! Her "backers" were the Central Pacific and then the Southern Pacific Railroad Companies.

From 1879 to 1930, our nation's first trancontinental railroad connected New York with San Francisco by passing over Carquinez Strait on the train ferry *Solano*. This unique side-wheeler was for thirty-five years the largest craft of her kind in the entire world--a veritable wonder of her age. Yet in spite of her mammoth size and weight--3549 tons--she was ever called "beautiful" by men who understood such construction. And as with many "Stars" of the past, her stage was small--the three-mile span of water between Benicia's train ferryslip and the Port Costa terminal. Back and forth; back and forth; back and forth through splashing spray and seething foam for fifty-one years; an unbelievably reliable "leading lady;"--then, an ignominious end when the "curtain fell."

Solano was designed by, and built in 1879 under the supervision of, Arthur Brown, superintendent of the Bridge and Building Department of the Central Pacific Company, whose shipyard was at Oakland Point. For the first time ever, the principle of a truss bridge was applied in the con-

struction of a hull. A pair of walking (vertical) beam engines, each of 1500 horsepower, propelled *Solano* by means of "two great partially-covered paddle-wheels, thirty feet in diameter."

Residents of, and visitors to, Benicia before November of 1930 might remember that beloved "steamboat" if they are now at least fifty-five years old. The 420 foot long by 116 foot wide train ferry had a four parallel track deck and could carry two locomotives, her own and a "diamond-stacked Central Pacific eight-wheeler" with 24 passenger cars, or two locomotives and 36 freight cars. Yet because "the steering apparatus was hydraulically operated . . . one man had no difficulty in holding the huge boat to her course," even against storms and heavy tides. And that in 1879! Moreover, so superbly constructed and so ably operated was *Solano* that, during her half-century of churning through the Strait channel, she was practically never out of commission!

Cars and engines consistently became heavier between 1879 and 1930, yet *Solano* was able to cope because she had been designed with the future in mind. Cargo volume was something else.

So in 1914, *Contra Costa*--a still larger train ferry--was built as an assist, but the two boats operated "under an ever increasing burden until 1927, when they carried 98,262 passenger cars and 148,130 freight cars, their full capacity." A bridge was inevitable and by 1930 one had been constructed between Army Point just beyond Benicia and Suisun Point at the south-east tip of Carquinez Strait near Martinez. A "record performance" had ended. The

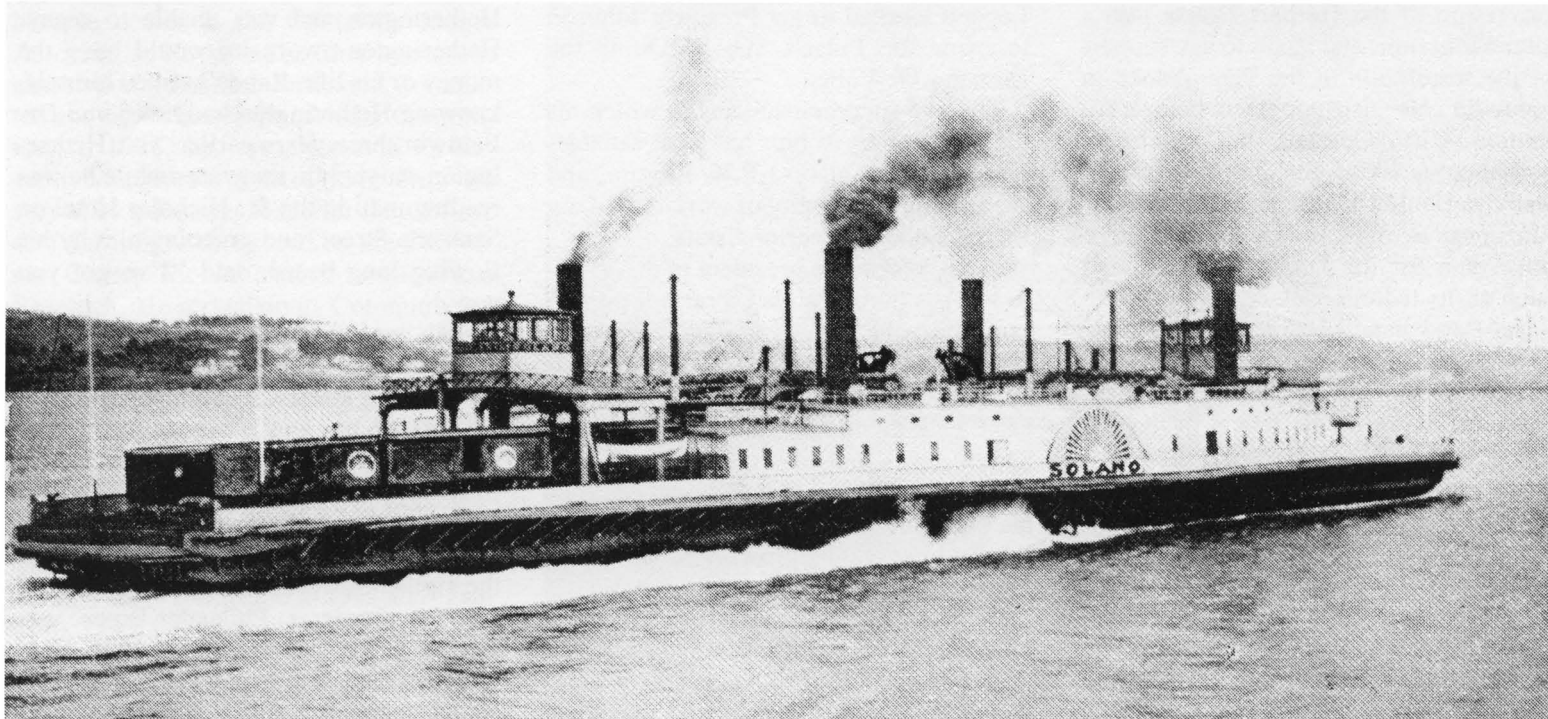
"theater was closed."

Never again on a heavenly night would poets, artists, and lovers alike thrill to *Solano's* widening moonlit wake--magically become a mermaid's bridal train, ablaze with glittering diamonds. Beauty and romance had again bowed to "Progress."

These two Wonders of the World, still the largest train ferries ever built, were finally dismantled. Tales of their fates vary. One author leaves *Solano's* hulk moored at Morrow Cove, sinking into the silt near the Carquinez Bridge. If this be so, then today she lies buried in the foundation-soil of the California Maritime Academy, where young men and women learn to navigate those seas which *Solano* never knew.

A college student then, I was aboard the beloved ferry-boat when she made her last official trip to Port Costa on Saturday, November 1, 1930. I can still remember the thrill I felt on the return train-trip across "The New Bridge," halfway to the sky. I was too immature to comprehend the tragic effect *Solano's* demise would have upon Benicia and Port Costa, and thousands of involved people, or that an era of "river pageantry" was over.

Now, forty-seven years later, as I tearfully write this nostalgic tribute, I understand the sorrow which must have filled the hearts of many old time residents when, on that autumn day, they bade a last farewell to a tried and faithful friend; a friend that for those many years had sustained a dramatic water-oriented way of life for the Strait communities--that train ferry par excellence, *Solano*!



The *Solano*, the largest train ferry in the world before the *Contra Costa*, was operated by the Southern Pacific Railway Company from December 30, 1879, to October 15, 1930.

Judge Randall Retires

by Matthew Fountain

The Honorable Ellis R. Randall, after twenty years of serving as a judge of the Solano County Superior Court, retired October 31, 1986. It is fitting that we recall his distinguished career, and the exceptional service he has rendered our community.

When the Solano County Historical Society held its first organizational meeting February 29, 1956, in Fairfield, there was much to do, and for the first few years the pace of accomplishment was tremendous.

There were many reasons for this. It took on worthy projects of immense appeal involving many people and generating much positive publicity. And its social activities of programs, trips, and dinners were inexpensive, yet prestigious. Who wouldn't want to take a bus tour and dinner at Mare Island Naval Shipyard for \$3.50 (June 1961), a five hour cruise on the Show Boat Mansion Belle on the Sacramento River with a trio for dancing and a buffet supper for \$4.50 (Sept. 1961), or a tour and prime rib roast dinner at Travis Air Force Base for \$2.75 (Oct. 1961)! The most popular event of each year was the Annual Dinner at the Nut Tree.

Active from the start was Ellis Randall. The files of the Society show his hand in practically everything the Society did. He was the one who appeared before the county supervisors to ask their help in funding conversion of the Herbert House into a Solano museum, and again to ask support for the restoration of the Pena Adobe in Vacaville. He also appeared before the Benicia City Council to obtain its assistance in asking for the State to take over the Hanlon House in Benicia.

Besides acting as an authoritative spokesman for the Society, he assumed much of the tedious, detailed work of the Society and handled a voluminous correspondence. Obviously he contributed not only his own efforts but that of his secretary. Some of the letters dealt with such critical problems as the discovery that the lot intended for the Herbert House was shown on an old city map as being over a street never built and with a shape not conforming to existing fence lines. Should the city abandon the street, the land would revert to the neighbors. Fortunately, the neighbors fancied having the museum next to them, and the matter was amicably settled.

During work on the Herbert House, he

received many of its bills. These bills invariably showed that labor and material costs had been partially absorbed by the supplier. Ellis Randall would send a letter of thanks, with mention that the bill would be paid as soon as money was available, and sometimes ending with "Why not join this great organization? It is \$8.00 a year and you will enjoy the finest association and fellowship in this country." He then would forward the bill to Percy Neitzel, the treasurer, with a note asking it be paid, if there were any money handy.

He spoke to a number of organizations, from the Soroptimist International to an elementary school class that later sent him a \$2.00 donation for the Society. He recruited many new members into the Society. He solicited speakers for the meetings, writing long letters to the speakers in advance, and then sending thoughtful letters of appreciation afterwards. He was master of ceremonies at various functions such as the 1960 ceremony in which Mare Island Naval Shipyard was declared a California Historical Landmark. His daughter Diane unveiled the plaque.

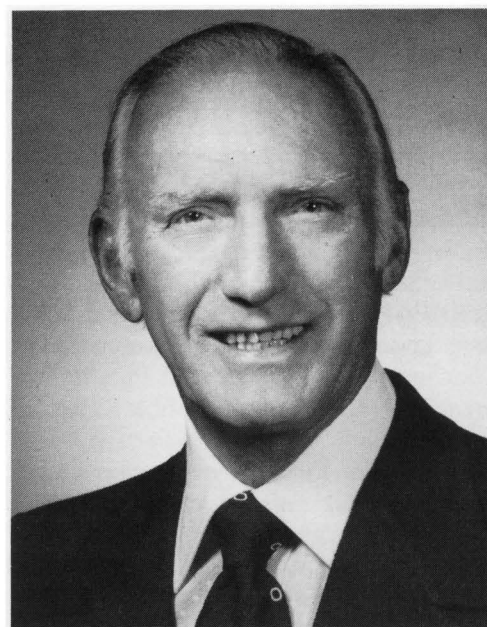
He served as president of the Society for the two terms between 1959 and 1961, succeeding Robert Power.

When interviewed for this article, it did not occur to him to mention the part he played in the Historical Society. He would rather tell of how others helped the society, such as how C.M. Syar donated 500 yards of top soil and graded the grounds for the Herbert House and that Carl Recknagel was in charge of building renovation, or how Congressman Robert Leggett worked to get President Johnson to name the Polaris Sub SSBN658 the Mariano G. Vallejo.

The two accomplishments in which his participation gave him his most satisfaction were the Vallejo J.F.K. Library, and the volume and quality of work turned out by the Solano Superior Court.

While serving as president of the Vallejo Friends of the Public Library, his group conceived the idea of financing the new library through the Redevelopment Agency. Working with Vallejo's City Manager Lohn Ficklin, means were found to secure \$1,950,000 in library lease revenue bonds and a grant of \$900,000 from the California state library system. It is a building that is built to serve the growing needs of the future.

He much more enjoyed talking about his grandfather's older brother Dr. Andrew Randall. Dr. Randall actually was a geologist, but he was known to everyone as Doctor. He came to San Francisco April 12, 1849, with General James Collier who



Judge Ellis Randall.

had been assigned a post as Head of Customs. Randall was assigned as the Collector of Customs in Monterey, where he became a favorite of the Mexican population, who succeeded in electing him to the second session of the California Assembly. One of the laws enacted was the death penalty for robbery and grand larceny. The reason for this law was the absence of jails, and no means to replace out-of-ordinary tools. It remained on the books for five years.

Dr. Randall was then appointed postmaster of Monterey. During this time he began dealing in Mexican ranchos, acquiring five, including a big 44,000 acre property at Point Reyes.

Land poor, he borrowed money from an English gambler by the name of Joseph Hetherington and was unable to repay. Hetherington swore he would have the money or his life. Randall armed himself, knowing Hetherington had murdered Dr. Baldwin three years earlier. But Hetherington caught him unawares while he was reading mail in the St. Nicholas Hotel on Sansome Street, and grabbing him by his flowing long beard, said "I've got you now."

Both men drew their guns and fired, missing each other. By family tradition, Randall then had the drop on Hetherington, but he put his gun down and crouched behind a counter. Hetherington came right over and shot him.

Justice was swift. Two days later while the funeral bells were ringing for Randall, the vigilantes were hanging Hetherington. Another murderer, Philander Brace, was hanged at the same moment. H.H. Bancroft devoted seven pages of Volume 37 of his *Works* to describe the details of the hangings, which were observed by a crowd of fifteen thousand.

Over the years Ellis has gathered material about Dr. Randall while toying with the idea of making him the subject of a book. Before making a final decision, he says he must become used to being without a secretary. Others have written on Dr. Randall as he was certainly noteworthy. Among other things, he was the founder and the first president of the California Academy of Sciences now in Golden Gate Park. He had established the first newspaper in Minnesota, the *Minnesota Register*. His wife was a Todd, a niece of Abraham Lincoln.

By chance Ellis located in the Solano Courthouse the original record of a law suit involving General Vallejo and Dr. Randall. General Vallejo sued claiming he had sold Randall 30,000 acres of land lying along what is now Highway 680, the Gibson freeway, for \$15,000 down and a mortgage of \$25,000 and had received nothing on the mortgage. Randall answered by saying that on the face of it it looked as if the mortgage were due, but Vallejo and he had agreed outside of what was written that the mortgage was not due until Vallejo's Soscil Grant had been confirmed, and Vallejo would vigorously proceed before the land commission, and he hadn't. Vallejo lost because his lawyer had filed the suit over in Marin county as Randall lived in Corte Madera. The law required filing in the location the land is situated.

Ellis R. Randall was appointed judge of the Solano County Superior Court by Governor Edmond Brown in December 1966, and was reelected four times.

After appointment, Judge Randall became active in the California Judges Association. He served as Chairman of the association's Public Information Committee and of its Bench-Bar-Media Committee. In 1978, he was elected to its Executive Board for a three-year term. He served as a seminar leader at the College of Trial Judges sponsored by the California Center for Judicial Education and Research. He served on its Committee on Civil Law and Procedure.

He was born in San Francisco, California. After receiving his B.A. degree from the University of Nevada, he received his law Degree from University of California's School of Jurisprudence in Berkeley.

He engaged in private practice in Oakland, California, from 1934 to 1936 and in Vallejo from 1936 to 1942 and again from 1945 until his appointment to the bench. In 1940 he was elected President of the Solano County Bar Association.

On April 8, 1942, he married the former Marian Leachman, the daughter of a Vallejo physician. December 1942 he was com-

missioned as Lieutenant in the United States Naval Reserve, serving till May as Executive Officer of two naval air stations near San Diego, California, and later served at the Bureau of Aeronautics in Washington, D.C. He was separated from the Naval Service as a Lieutenant Commander.

Upon returning to Vallejo, he was associated with and later became a partner with Russell F. O'Hara, City Attorney and subsequent President of the State Bar. It was a busy law practice representing personal injury and business plaintiffs together with a number of entities, including insurance companies, government agencies, hospitals, utilities, newspapers, and department stores. The firm participated in the State Bar Activities, with Judge Randall serving on several committees, including the one that resulted in passage of the Inferior Court Act of 1950 which established the municipal and justice court system as we know it today. He also served on the State Bar's Pre-Trial Committee which helped introduce pretrial conference procedure in California. He was active in the Solano County Bar's effort to provide a Public Defender System and a Vallejo Branch Court.

In 1953 he was elected to the State Bar's Board of Governors for a three year term. From 1956 to 1960 he was Vice Chairman of the State Bar's Legislative Committee and subsequently became Chairman, with duties frequently taking him to Sacramento. He also served on the State Bar Committee to Reform the California Constitution and also its Fair Trial - Free Press

Committee.

On August 27, 1960, he was elected a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, whose membership is limited to no more than one percent of the lawyers in any one state. He is a former member of the Board of Governors (1955-60) of the California Maritime Academy in Vallejo.

He is a past president of the following organizations: Vallejo Chamber of Commerce, Vallejo Kiwanis Club, Vallejo Golf Club, Navy League of the U.S. - Vallejo Council No. 1 (twice), Solano County Historical Society (twice), and Vallejo Friends of the Public Library.

He is a charter member of the Green Valley Country Club. He was one of the founders and incorporators of the Vallejo Downtown Association and of the Solano County Taxpayer's Association. He was one of the founders, member of the first Board of Directors, and Secretary Treasurer of the Solano County Fair Board.

He is a member of the Elks Lodge, a Mason, a Shriner, and a Republican.

In 1975 his wife, Marian, died after a long illness. He has one daughter Diane Vale and one grandson, Erik Beauchamp. In 1978 Judge Randall married the former Maxine H. Smith, a prominent leader in local civic and cultural organizations.

It is difficult for anyone knowing the long hours and the innumerable details associated with an active law practice and judgeship to conceive how one man could have done so much. And in particular how he could have accomplished it with so much grace.



"The Museum . . . has been the work of many people and firms, but no one deserves more credit for establishing it than Ellis Randall . . ." (Quote from December, 1961, Note Book from which this picture has been taken.)

George Dingley and the Early Mills of Solano

by M. Clyde Low

1. The Ghost that Refuses to Die

In the fall season of recent years for Halloween entertainment of the young the local newspapers of central Solano County are wont to resurrect the ghost legend of the girl who perished in the old Dingley Mill in Green Valley, and whose dying screams are said to be heard on quiet nights. The tale is embellished with photographs of a gutted stone structure with weathered board doors, broken window panes and clinging ivy.¹ The source of the legend can be traced to an early newspaper account of the tragic death of Mary Eliza Parker, age 17 years and 11 months on August 5, 1864. The published account is as follows:

"Accidental Death - Last Friday afternoon, by one of those unfortunate accidents which by their very isolation shock the community more than tidings from the bloody battlefield, or of the march of a dreadful pestilence, a young lady of great beauty and remarkable intellectual endowments was hurried into the Great Unseen, while in the flush of hope and the bloom of youth. A number of visitors were at Dingley's Mill in Green Valley, amusing themselves in inspecting the machinery and its operation, when Miss Mary E. Parker passed between one of the hoppers and the perpendicular shaft by which the motive power is supplied to the stones. While leaning over the hopper and handling the barley that was being chopped, her dress stuck to the grease on the slowly revolving shaft, and soon wound round so as to become fast. She did not seem to realize the extreme peril of her position, and said to the miller near by, in a half-laughing tone, "My dress is caught!" The miller cried out, "My dear girl--you will be killed!" and sprang to her aid while orders for the stopping of the machinery were instantly given; but it was too late; losing her balance, by the irresistible motion of the shaft, she was thrown down with great force, her head striking the cast iron boxing of one of the stones so violently as to break the iron in, spattering her brains all around and killing her in an instant. The girl's mother was in the mill, and frantically sought to seize her child, but was forcibly prevented from placing herself in danger. It was a horrible sight to witness, but the bystanders could not do anything for several minutes to rescue the body. The mill is carried by water power, having a wheel sixty-five feet in diameter--the largest in the United States--and no mortal power could stop the machinery in season. If the girl had known her danger, and had retained her presence of mind so as to clasp the shaft with her hands and go round with it until speed was slackened, this calamity would not have occurred."²

The death of Mary Parker was only the first one of a series of misfortune that marked the history of this landmark.

2. The Enterprising Emigrant

The builder, owner and operator of this ill-fated mill in Green Valley was George Dingley, a pioneer emigrant to California, who was settled in Solano County at least

by the year 1850. This article will describe the activities of George Dingley and his contributions to early Solano County.

George Dingley was born in Connecticut about 1825 and died in Cacheville, present Woodland, California, in 1867. He is first listed in Solano County records in the U.S. Census of September 1850 as a resident of Benicia, age 25 and occupation, carpenter. Whether he came overland or by ship is unknown.³ A bachelor all his life, Dingley was evidently staying in a rooming house for newly arrived young men. The fellow residents of his place of dwelling, as enumerated on the census sheet, included nine other persons, all of whom originated on the east coast and all but one were in their twenties or younger. They were by occupation two sailors, two farmers--one with a 17-year old "female" of the same surname, and one with a two-year old boy born in California. Also included were a merchant and two other carpenters.

Dingley demonstrated Yankee enterprise in promptly making a place for himself in the business life of the new town of Benicia, which had been founded only three years before in 1847. He is recorded as being given the power of attorney by a local resident, Josiah Knight, and as being the owner of two building lots in Benicia in 1852. In 1853, he bought a 64-acre mill tract in Green Valley, where he built and ran a flour mill. In the 1854 tax roll he was listed as the owner of a third Benicia lot with a building erected on it worth \$2,000.⁴ The 1855 Delinquent Tax List showed him as owning yet a fourth lot with a structure on it worth \$1,200. Whether he, as a carpenter by trade, built

houses on vacant land or by plying his trade earned money to buy lots with houses already constructed is not indicated.

In the tax assessment roll of August, 1858, at which time he was established in Green Valley, he is credited with owning a \$3,000 steam mill and being worth \$4,445 in personal and real property. The U.S. Census of June 1860 lists his wealth at \$30,000 in real property and \$1,000 in personal property.

3. The First Flour Mill in Solano County

The first water-powered flour mill in Solano County was built by George Dingley in 1853 at the headwaters of Wildhorse Creek in upper Green Valley. It utilized the water flowing down from and below the scenic Green Valley Falls. The location and later occupancy of this watershed by the City of Vallejo in 1893 is described in the December 1985 issue of the *Solano Historian*.⁵ The existence of this pioneer mill, heretofore unidentified in local oral tradition or historical literature, was revealed by examination of land and civil court records. The first clue was discovered in a deed to George Dingley on August 25, 1853, from a "Charles P[omeroy] Stone of the U.S. Army," as attorney for three San Francisco land speculators, conveying a 64-acre parcel in the watershed referred to above. The parcel is described as "commencing at a post and stones **near Dingley's Mill stream.**"⁶ This clearly indicated the prior existence of a milling operation in that area of Solano County.

The second clue to its existence was found in the civil suit of Robert H. Vance,



The writer, M.C. Low, pointing out likely site of George Dingley's first mill of 1853 on Wildhorse Creek in upper Green Valley.

a ranch owner of 700 acres of land in Ulatis (or Vaca) Valley against George Dingley on February 2, 1857, for not fulfilling the contract they had made in San Francisco on **August 14, 1854**. He claimed that Dingley had delivered only 600 of the 800-1,000 barrels of flour due from the amount of wheat supplied by Vance to him. The case dragged out for six years of successive appeals, with Dingley eventually the winner.⁷ In addition to providing another confirmation of this previously unknown mill's existence, it shows that the mill served an area as far away as present day Vacaville, and thus indicates the scarcity of milling services for farmers in central Solano County and the contribution Dingley was making to the agricultural economy of the County.

Testimony given in the case by the workers as material witness included that of one Millard Meister. He identifies himself as "German, 28 years, in the United States in the spring of 1849, in Green Valley in the fall of 1853;" and continues, "I began working at the mill in December 1853 at various tasks, including preparing the dam. Wheat was ground in December 1853 and in January, February and March 1854. There was no water in June, July and August to grind wheat." Dingley, himself, testified that "the mill was in continuous operation 24 hours a day after December 1854, when an engine was installed, until the fall of 1855."⁸ Dingley on a later occasion recorded that the mill continued to operate until the fall of 1857 when he moved a mile downstream to undertake a larger milling operation.

The precise location of this first mill has been finally identified on an 1856 survey published as a "Map of the Eastern Portion of Suscol Rancho."⁹ This map shows the location of the mill in the upper area of Dingley's 64-acre parcel. A field inspection of the site lying just above the City of Vallejo picnic ground revealed a low knoll adjacent to the stream suitable for a natural ramp to haul grain to an upper level of a mill structure. Stone steps were found ascending from the stream level. Further exploration located the remaining ends of a low stone dam on either side of the creek. (See photographs).

4. The History of Mill Construction in California and Solano County

Constructed between the years 1853 and 1860, the Dingley flour mills were part of an accelerating curve of mill construction by Americans during the first three decades of their occupation of California, the 1850's, 1860's, and 1870's, during which period grain production was the foremost agricultural activity. Between



Stone steps and path leading from knoll to stream bed at George Dingley's first mill site of 1853.



Remnant of eastern end of the dam serving George Dingley's 1853 mill. Behind the writer can be seen the Wildhorse Creek's upper course. The Green Valley Falls is about an eighth of a mile farther upstream.

1852 and 1855 in Solano County, for example, grain output nearly tripled.¹⁰

California's first water-powered grist mill--a grist mill is a custom operation for local farmers--had been built in 1794 in Santa Cruz and another is recorded in Santa Inez in 1821.¹¹ The Russians constructed a wind-powered flour mill at their colony of Fort Ross some time after 1812. It was still standing in 1842 when John Sutter took possession.¹²

Herbert H. Bancroft in his *History of California* provides a survey of the growth

of American mill-building as follows: "Spanish Californians produced grain only for their wants, and were content to grind it on the household metate, or at best, with arastras, by mules... The Americans quickly applied water-power to the mills erected in the early forties in Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Sonoma, San Joaquin, and by Sutter; Capt. Smith's combined saw and grist mill possessing the only steam-power before the gold era... In 1854 there were 54 mills; in 1869, 91 mills; in 1870, 115. The Census of 1880 enumerates 150, [of



Trace of the half-mile pipeline bed from George Dingley's second dam to his second mill of 1859/60.



Cistern at south end of the pipeline from where water from the dam would have been carried by a trestle to the water wheel of the mill. The northwest side of the mill ruin can be discerned downslope.

which] 97 were operated by steam... The largest mill [was] erected at Vallejo in 1869."¹³ This was the Starr Mills, which later became the Sperry Flour Co. Bancroft's survey does not single out any other mills by name in Solano County. George Dingley's mills were not cited, even though they may have been entered into the enumerations.

During the years of operation of Dingley's first mill or 1853-57 and before

the building of his second mill in 1859 to 1860 several other flour mills were built in Solano County. In Suisun City, founded in 1851 and a major port for shipping grain across the San Francisco Bay in the old "bay schooners" until the advent of the railroad in 1868, a water-powered grist mill was built in 1854 by J.G. Edwards and S.C. Read beside a local stream. It must have had an "undershot" wheel design as contrasted with the "overshot" type of

George Dingley's mill on the headwaters of Wildhorse Creek, where the steeper gradient allowed for conducting the downstream flow by sluice and trestle to the top of a waiting water wheel. With a frame structure, this first Suisun City mill was in operation from October 1854 to the spring of 1858, when it was demolished and replaced by a three-story mill made of cut stone and brick and powered by a 40-horsepower steam engine. The latter was operational in October 1858.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that the contract (discussed below) made by George Dingley with the stone mason, John O'Connor, on December 30, 1858, for his next mill specified that "the stone work is to be done similar to the stone work of the Suisun Mills, located in Suisun City."

5. George Dingley, Squatter and Title Holder

George Dingley's entrepreneurial activity as a miller involved him in the throes of the tumultuous phase of California history involving disputed land title ownership. In basic conflict were the Mexican and American heirs of former Mexican land grant titles and the claimants to the same territory as "public land", the landless American settlers. This research reveals that Dingley sought to guarantee his land rights by joining both sides in this struggle at the same time.

The cities of Benicia and Vallejo and the watershed of Green Valley were part of the huge 84,000-acre territory, called the Suscol Grant, that former Mexican *Comandante General*, Mariano G. Vallejo, claimed to have received as a personal land grant on June 19, 1844, from the governor of Mexican California, Manuel Micheltorena. As with all Mexican land grant claims, it was examined for validity under Mexican land laws before being honored as required by the treaty with Mexico of 1848. The claim although confirmed at the first two stages was finally argued on appeal before the U. S. Supreme Court between 1857 and 1862 and rejected as "imperfect" under the former Mexican land laws.¹⁵

Dingley had bought his original 64-acre "mill tract" in 1853 from holders of the Vallejo title to the Suscol Grant. Now in 1857 as the "Suscol Claim" was being challenged in the Supreme Court, he entered as a "squatter" upon a parcel of land farther down the valley with the intention of establishing a future right to it if the Vallejo title should be invalidated and the Suscol land be declared "public land" open to American settlers under federal pre-emption laws.

Testimony in a later lawsuit—one of the

many litigations in which Dingley became involved--stated that he had settled as early as November 1, 1857, upon this parcel of valley land lying one mile south of his first mill site, and that he had improved some eleven acres of this land by planting a garden, vineyard and also by digging into the hillside on the northern edge to build an earthen ramp for his future mill structure.¹⁶

In this suit Dingley was defending his claim to ownership against the claims of holders of "Vallejo" titles to the land in dispute. Included among the defendants was the name of John Stilts, the first settler in the valley, who had purchased the land from General Vallejo back in 1849. By the time of this lawsuit (1866) part of the land in the Stilts title had been acquired by the Granville P. Swift of Bear Flag Party fame. Swift's stone wall--still existing as the north fence of the Green Valley Country Club golf links--was cited as constituting the limit of any claim Dingley could extend in that southerly direction. (See photographs) What appears only as a picturesque ornament today, once had substantial legal meaning to former owners.

On April 19, 1858, George Dingley took two legal steps to protect his ownership rights. He purchased a "Vallejo" title to a 6.82-acre parcel from John D. Bristol, a land speculator of Sacramento whose title had descended from the same John Stilts referred to above; and on the same day at the U. S. Land Office in San Francisco, Dingley formally declared his status as a settler under the provisions of the U. S. Preemption Law of 1853. In his "Declaratory Statement" he "claims to have settled and improved the following described Government lands, to wit, the southwest quarter of Section number twenty-three...containing one hundred and sixty acres, which land has not been offered at public sale and thus rendered subject to private entry.¹⁷ This claim to the quarter section took in all of land that was to be owned subsequently by Granville Swift and at present by the Green Valley Country Club!

6. The Stone Mill of 1859/60

The deed from John D. Bristol to George Dingley of April 19, 1858, reveals the significance of Dingley's milling enterprise for the enhancement of agricultural development in Solano County. Bristol who had invested in the Green Valley area only two months before, conveyed title to the 6.82-acre parcel for "the sum of one dollar...and in consideration that...[Dingley]...shall erect upon the premises...a flouring and grist mill."¹⁸



The three story stone structure of George Dingley's second mill taken some years after the fire of 1867 gutted the wooden structural parts. The trestle would have carried the water to the wheel from the hill slope on the right. (Photo stamped "Solano Art Studio-J.G. Smith Vallejo, Calif." no date.)

Dingley thereby committed himself to a venture that would bring him profit, local eminence, historical note and, perhaps, his greatest woes.

It was not until the 30th of December that Dingley drew up a contract with a mason, one John O'Connor, for the latter to build "a stone building 60 feet long, 40 feet wide and 31 feet high with walls for the first two stories 2 feet thick and walls for the third story and gable ends, 18 inches thick." The price was agreed to be \$2,100.00, of which \$800 could be covered with a note for one year at an interest rate of 24% (sic!) per year. The building was to be finished in one year. The contract, for some reason, was not signed until March 23, 1859.¹⁹

O'Connor proceeded to build the stone structure with stone he cut from the local Burns and Harbin quarries, which, by the agreement, Dingley hauled to the site. In seven months, by December 7, 1859, the stone work on the building proper was completed. It must have appeared essentially as shown in the accompanying photograph, which was taken eight years later after a destructive fire destroyed all of the wood structures built onto it. (see below for details).

Along with the construction of the mill building, Dingley built a dam on the same "mill creek" about a half mile above the new site. He laid a twelve-inch diameter pipeline along the hillside to the south-east from the dam to bring the water to the top of his 40-foot overshot water wheel. A section of the pipeline's hillside trench is still visible to this day. (See photograph) The use of the mill pond for water power was abandoned in February 1866, when this se-

cond mill was also equipped with a more reliable steam power plant. Recurrent drought years, such as that of 1863-64, must have precipitated this conversion.

Separate walls to hold the large water wheel were built six feet away from the building wall--the one on the front right in the photograph. Between them a wheel pit eleven feet wide, 30 feet long and six feet below the bed of Green Valley Creek was to be excavated so that the main shaft of the wheel would enter the building at a height of fifteen feet. After cutting down five feet through extremely hard rock, O'Connor gave up on this separate project, which had been added by a later agreement in June of that year. Dingley was forced to finish the task after the main structure was built. This was one point of disagreement between the miller and the mason.

The other point developed later after Dingley decided as late as October to have the planned gables on the ends of the building omitted in favor of a new design for a "hip" roof on the building. When it came time to factor this into the payment due, the two men disagreed on how much should be deducted from the cost of the construction. O'Connor thought \$50 was appropriate; Dingley insisted on \$150, and for this petty difference he refused to pay O'Connor the final installment of the payment due for his services. O'Connor resorted to a Mechanics Lien on January 5, 1860, for \$1,033.16 which he calculated was due him on a principal and interest, and in September of that year commenced a lawsuit against Dingley for the purpose of foreclosing the lien.²⁰ The litigation in this case was to drag on for a full seven years, with successive appeals at each ver-

dict, taking the case as far as the Supreme Court of California! The last document in the file is dated June 2, 1867, with no indication as to which party won. By this date George Dingley had already lost possession of the mill one and one-half years earlier. He would also be dead in three months!

O'Connor's lien action of January 5, 1860, was immediately countered by Dingley with a suit against O'Connor in the County Court of Solano County for damages in the amount of \$200 for the extra cost of finishing the tailrace trench in the wet winter season. O'Connor promptly counter-sued for an equal amount for Dingley's failure to supply a suitable pump and suitable board for his workers.

An insight into George Dingley's personality, in addition to evidence of his apparently uncompromising character in all the litigation he got himself involved in, is suggested in the following testimony in this case from one of O'Connor's workers.²¹

"Mr. O'Connor boarded us in Mr. Dingley's house . . . [and] when [I] complained about the insufficiency of food for sustaining a laboring man, Mr. Dingley, who was present, became very angry and . . . told me with an oath 'Damn you, leave here as quick as you can' ! I was afraid of him and left. I did not return to work."

He further alleged that O'Connor offered to give Dingley all the work done so far on the trench without charge. It should be noted, however, that Dingley's witnesses disputed these statements. This case also dragged on with appeals until finally ended with a verdict in favor of Dingley on May 2, 1862, for damages of \$20 and costs of \$142.75; but an execution order to the sheriff, then John M. Neville, was "returned in no part satisfied."

In the meantime Dingley had hired a millwright, B.F. Shepard, on December 30, 1859, to design and construct the working machinery of the mill, while Dingley, himself, attended to putting on his hip roof and other carpentry. By the middle of 1860 the mill must have been in operation.

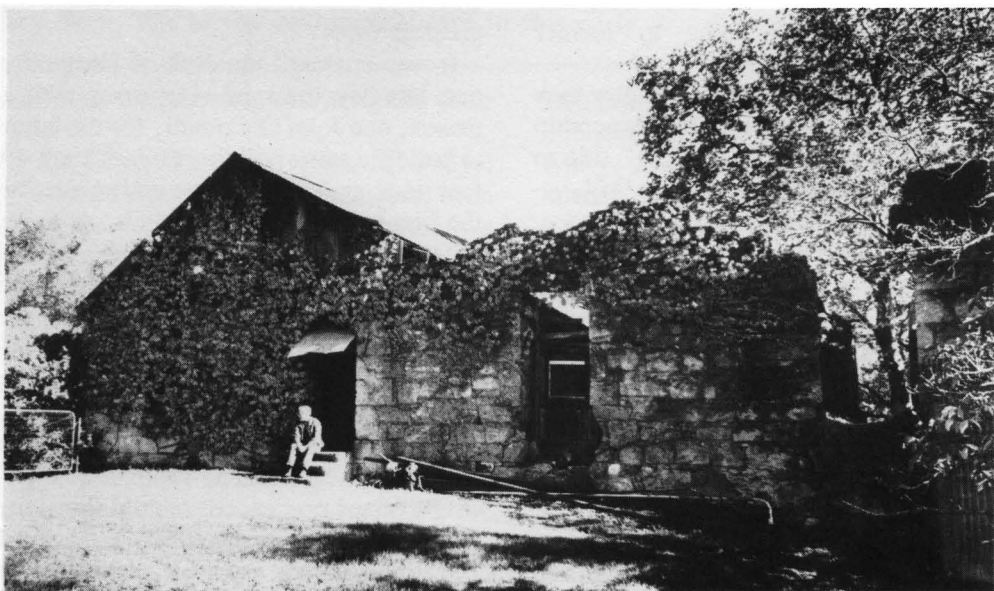
7. George Dingley, Citizen

George Dingley was now at the height of his career at age 34, a miller, worth \$30,000 in real estate and \$1,000 in personal property, according to the listing in the U.S. Census of June 26, 1860.

In the following years he appears to have been an involved citizen. He was empaneled a member of the Solano County Grand Jury on April 6, 1863. He also served as a delegate from Green Valley at the Union (political party) County Convention in both 1863 and 1864. The delegates elected Captain John B. Frisbie (General Vallejo's



The northeast face of George Dingley's 1859/60 mill as it appears today. The top story had been dismantled many years ago.



The northwest side of George Dingley's 1859/60 mill. This is the middle story where grain would have been taken inside. The top story's eastern part has been replaced by a makeshift wooden structure and metal roof.

son-in-law) and Captain Robert H. Waterman (a founding father of Fairfield) to the state convention. In 1864 they supported --it was during the Civil War--Abraham Lincoln for reelection with the slogan "suppress the rebellion and prosecute the war to final success."²²

Even after he was forced by a foreclosure eviction from his mill property in 1865 to establish a milling business in adjacent Yolo County, Dingley maintained his political involvement in Solano County. He is recorded as registering in the Green Valley district on July 31, 1867 for the general election of that year.²³

8. Dingley's Loss of the Mill

From this high point in his career the world of George Dingley began to unravel. Already strained by his double litigation with John O'Connor, he was now threatened from an unexpected quarter. As early as March 14, 1860, an A.M. Comstock, a San Francisco money lender and real estate broker, and his associate Frederick Repenn started a suit to foreclose a mortgage on all the mountain and valley land in upper Green Valley that John Bristol and another speculator, Cyrus Eastman, had separately acquired on February 9, 1858.²⁴ Bristol, as we have seen, had then sold the

6.82-acre part of his purchase to Dingley just two months later and without disclosing to him the mortgage liability! Eastman, who owned the mountain land, paid off the plaintiffs and released his tracts, but he specifically excluded any hill rights that may have been included in George Dingley's deed. Presumably Dingley, in keeping with his stubborn character, refused to do likewise. Thereupon a decree of sheriff's sale of Dingley's mill property was issued by the trial court on August 15, 1863. Dingley managed by several stratagems to delay his loss of the property for two and one-half years. He first subverted the foreclosure sale with the apparent connivance of the sheriff, John M. Neville, a close associate of his. When this stratagem was countermanded by the court, Dingley tried another ploy which convinced the judge to order a special survey to examine Dingley's objections. The court-ordered survey of September 1865, however, disproved Dingley's arguments.

On December 21, 1865, Frederick Repenn was finally in possession of Dingley's mill. In the May 4, 1866, issue of the *Solano Herald* the new owners, Frederick Repenn and his lawyer, and new partner, James B. Townsend advertised their installation of "a first class Steam Engine and Boiler, a new Run of Stone, new and superior Bolting Apparatus, Smutter and Separator and new Machinery generally . . . The substitution of Steam for Water-power will enable the mill hereafter to run constantly without interruption and to execute orders without any of the delays or uncertainties which have heretofore occurred from lack of water and other causes."

One could draw the inference that George Dingley might well have had operational as well as legal problems to deal with in his second milling enterprise of a brief three and one-half years.

9. Destruction of the Mill by Suspicious Fire

On November 13, 1867, the *Solano Press* carried this news report:

"Destroyed by Fire - On Monday night, the 11th inst., the well know "Dingley Mill," situated at the head of Green Valley, was completely destroyed by fire, unmistakably the work of a villainous incendiary. Nothing remains of the building except a few charred walls, and even the large wheel did not escape the conflagration. The mill was built by the late George Dingley seven years ago, but two years since the ownership was transferred to James B. Townsend of San Francisco who had it insured for \$8,000, one-half of the amount in the "Pacific" and \$4,000 in the "Manhattan Company." No clue has yet been discovered of the incendiary, but we have learned that the insurance companies hesitate about paying the policies on account of the suspicious nature of the fire. Future developments may reveal startling facts."

10. Epilogue

Undaunted by the loss of the mill in the closing days of 1865 George Dingley set out for Yolo County, where with Jabez Hatch, a Benicia merchant and general store proprietor, and also a fellow New Englander and Union party member, he built yet another flour mill in Cacheville --now called Yolo City. It was built of brick and was apparently steam powered.²⁵ George Dingley died in Cacheville on September 12, 1867.²⁶

Started by the haunting headlines of the

tale of the tragic death of a young girl in an old mill, this investigation has uncovered forgotten achievements, awakened sleeping monuments, revealed bitter controversies and followed endless court trials of early California. We met with a pioneer American, George Dingley, who came west to make his contribution to the development of California, and we followed his journey through those brief and turbulent times. The old ruin called the Dingley Mill still stands as one salient landmark of that journey.



The southwest corner of George Dingley's 1859/60 mill as it appears today with only two of the three stories standing.



Stone wall along the northern edge of the former Granville Perry Swift ranch which set a visible and physical limit to George Dingley's squatter's claim to this area. This acreage is now part of the Green Valley Country Club.

Sperry Flour Mill

by Ernest Wichels
and Matthew Fountain

What is undoubtedly Solano County's second oldest industry, and celebrating its 118th birthdate this year, is the Sperry Division of General Mills, Inc., located on Mare Island Strait in South Vallejo.

Its history goes back to a flour mill built in South Vallejo in 1869 by Abraham Dubois Starr. Like other mills of that period, its grinding was done by means of the old-fashioned millstones. It had a capacity of 400 barrels a day.

Starr had come overland to California in the spring of 1849 with three other young men. Both his parents had died several years before. He first tried mining, but abandoned it after a heavy snow and heavy runoff washed away a dam he had built with his savings.

The year 1852 found him in the freight business with a Mr. Brown supplying mining camps from Sacramento to Marysville. He was the first to succeed in reaching Downieville over the mountain route with

wagons, an event marked by a lively celebration.

In 1856 he married Mary Anna Teegarden, daughter of Dr. Eli Teegarden. Mr. Teegarden owned the Buckeye Mill, a flour mill built at Marysville in 1853. In 1861 the Marysville Directory listed the mill under A.D. Starr & Company. Starr sold the mill to J.H. Bowman and Justus Greeley when he left Marysville to come to Vallejo. Much later, in 1902, the mill was taken over by the Sperry Flour Company.

A.D. Starr came to Vallejo in late 1868, at first operating his new mill alone. In 1871 he was joined by his brother, Capt. Augustus W. Starr.

For the first few years their operation was overshadowed by another enterprise which dominated the waterfront and captured the imagination of all local businessmen, the Vallejo Elevator.

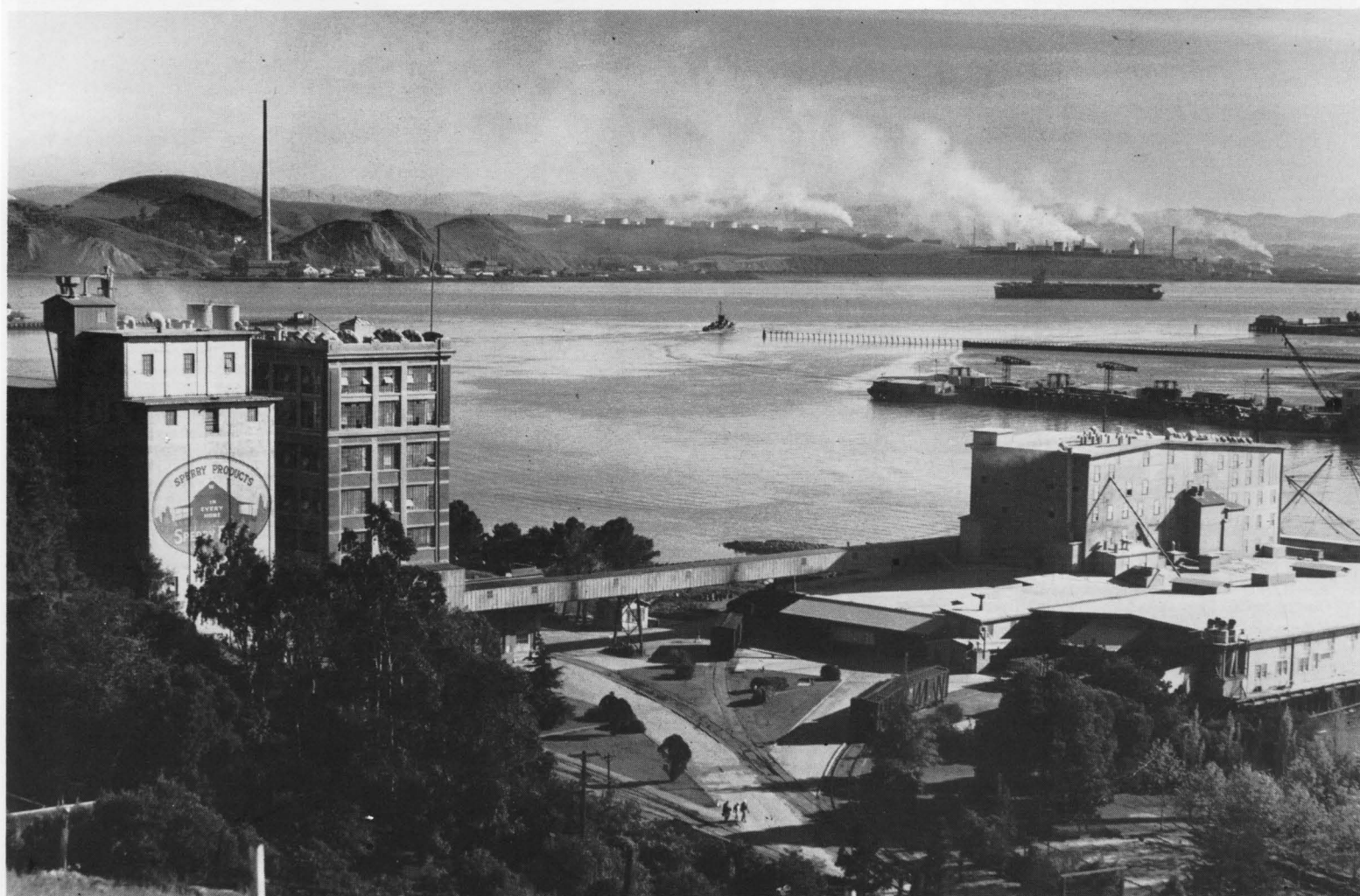
Central California was, in the 1860's, in transition from a cattle country (hides and tallow) to a wheat empire. Eastern visitors noted that while California was growing and exporting thousands of tons of wheat annually, the farmers adhered to the use of sacks in handling their grain, a

practice Easterners considered a useless and extravagant waste.

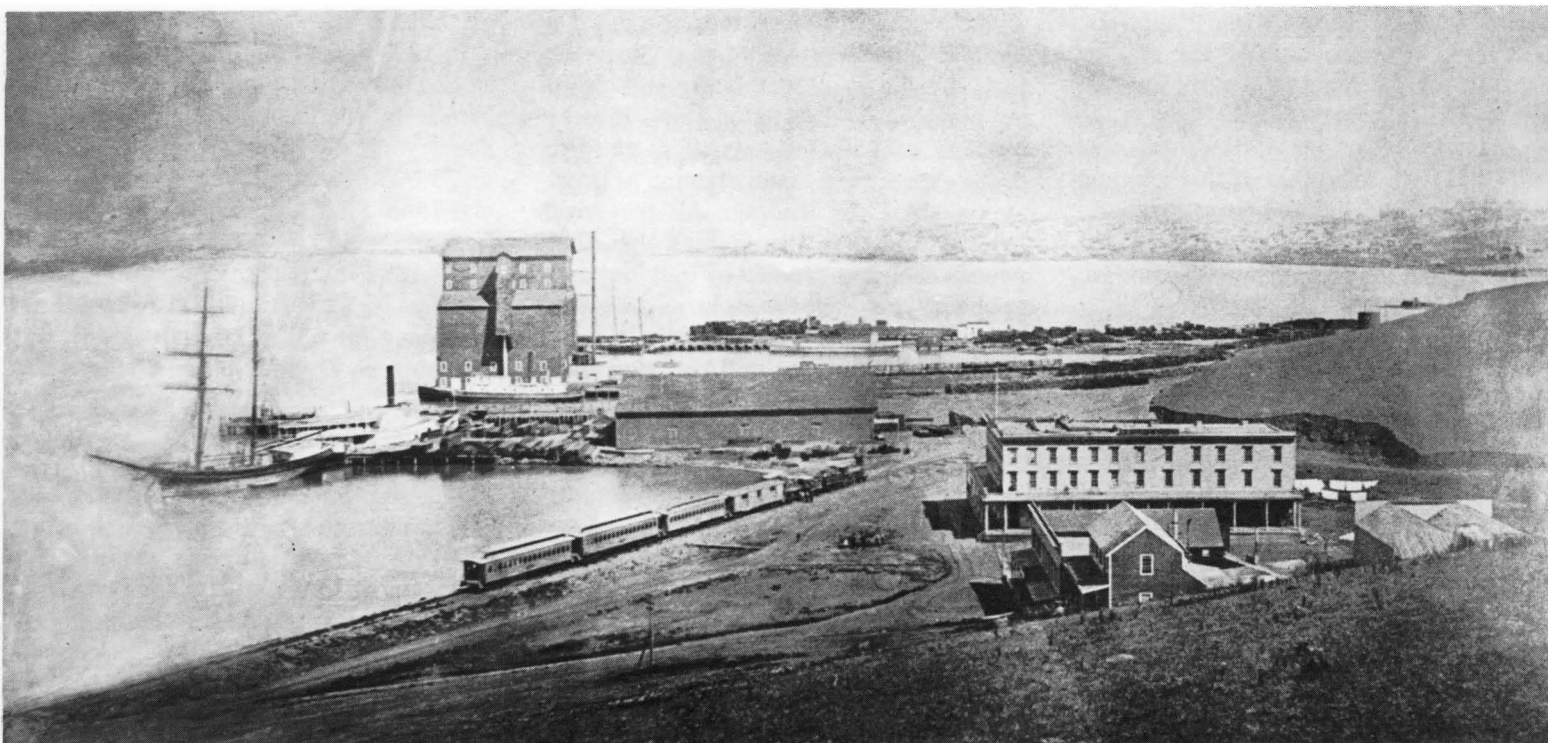
In 1867 G.C. Pierson, a Chicago grain elevator man and a capitalist, came to the state determined to introduce the elevator system of handling grain in bulk. Finding the new railroad tidewater terminus at Vallejo most suitable, he decided to erect his elevator on the waterfront of Vallejo. However, he was compelled to abandon the project when he was unable to reach an understanding with the railroad. His idea was then taken up by others. The *Vallejo Evening Chronicle* of May 22, 1869, devoted an entire page to the inauguration of the Vallejo Elevator, as it was then called.

The grain elevator project was nurtured into development by Dr. D.W. Rice, president of the California Pacific Railroad and for whom Rice Street in Vallejo is named, General John B. Frisbie, founder of the city of Vallejo and son-in-law of Mariano Vallejo, and other local citizens.

They associated themselves with Charles Wheeler, a grain merchant of Oswego, New York, who was elected superintendent of the Vallejo Elevator Company, afterwards incorporated with the follow-



This picture of the General Mills Flour Mill was taken before the razing of the tall smokestack (upper left) of the American Smelting and Refining Company's lead smelter. The busy Union Oil Refinery appears in the upper right.



This 1872 view of South Vallejo shows Isaac Friedlander's Grain Elevator, the schooner *Alice Waacke*, two steamers, the *Sacramento* and the *Vallejo*, the California Pacific Railroad Company's Vallejo and Sacramento passenger train with Engine #1, Yolo, and Engine #4, Yuba, the Thomas and Hunt warehouse, and a livery stable.

ing officers and stockholders: I. Friedlander, D.C. Haskin, Charles Wheeler, D.W.C. Rice, Dr. Spencer, and J.B. Frisbie. They selected as architect Robert Mackie of Chicago.

Because of lack of suitable building materials, the scheduled "cornerstone-laying" for the summer of 1868 was delayed until almost wintertime.

The first phase was the piling and capping by John A. Fulton, a contractor of San Francisco. The initial work consisted of 700 piles, with an average length of 40 feet. These were joined by heavy timbers as braces against capsizing in an earthquake.

Then the entire area was filled in with thousands of yards of stone.

The first structure was massive. The first two floors of the elevator were made of 12x12-inch timbers from Puget Sound; the posts in the structure numbered 260, capped by 12x18-inch timbers running the width of the structure, which was 85 feet.

The third floor consisted of grain bins, built in crib-fashion, each 10x20 feet with hoppers in the bottom.

There were three grain elevators (emptying through wooden spouts) for receiving, and two elevators for loading. In both cases there were huge scales for weighing, manufactured by Fairbanks.

The handling capacity of the elevator was 35,000 bushels per day, and the storage capacity of the building was 350,000 bushels.

A separate building housed the engine

and boilers, with a 118-foot smokestack. An example of the size of the operation can be gleaned by knowing that the driving belt on the main engine was 226 feet long and 30 inches in width.

The roof of the building was covered with tin.

While the elevator could handle grain brought in by steam railway connected with Solano, Yolo, Napa, and Sacramento Valley grain regions, much of the incoming grain came by barges from the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and tributaries.

The river barges were built in several locations, including Benicia, but surprising to many is the fact that numerous wooden wheat barges were built in a shipyard in the town of Maine Prairie on Cache Slough. The site, today, is the pumping plant of the Vallejo Municipal Water intake.

By 1870 Vallejo was the leading wheat export port in the United States; Jim Hill hadn't yet "discovered" the Dakotas and Minnesota with his railroads.

Before Christmas Day 1869, the first year of the operation of this Friedlander elevator, twenty-two clipper ships had loaded from this Vallejo elevator, bound for English ports.

The first clipper ship to load was the British "Star of Hope," followed by the "Lizzie Williams."

The elevator was the pride and hope of Vallejo, as the beginning of another great grain mart of the world. It towered above

everything along the waterfront and its picture was used freely by the business men of Vallejo for advertising. But the farmer would not cooperate. He and the grain merchants of the Pacific coast had become wedded to the idea of handling grain in sacks. Also the insurance agents discriminated against grain in bulk as its shifting was considered a cause for sailing ships to capsize. Mr. Friedlander ended up using the elevator as a warehouse, storing the grain he purchased from the farmers.

Then on September 16, 1872, a brief three years after its erection, the elevator collapsed into a monstrous heap, its face buried thirty feet deep in the mud of the estuary. The roar of the crash reached almost every ear in town.

Now we return to the Starr mill. In 1874 its building was enlarged and another unit installed with a capacity of 600 barrels. The following year A. Brannstetter was made a partner in the mills, which became Starr & Company, also known as Starr Mills.

Meanwhile A.D. Starr participated in civic activities in Solano as he had in Marysville. He was elected a Solano County supervisor and in 1873 he was a delegate to the Republican convention in Philadelphia which nominated Grant for reelection. Then in 1879 he and his family moved to Oakland while his brother remained in South Vallejo.

The business prospered, and in 1883 it was incorporated under the name of Starr

& Co. by A.D. Starr, Alfred Bannister, George C. Perkins, all of the city of Oakland, A.W. Starr of South Vallejo, Justus Greeley and N.D. Rideout of Marysville. The capitalization was \$830,000 with \$550,000 of this credited to Bannister and the two Starr brothers. The old millstones were replaced, the mill enlarged and converted into a modern roller mill. Its capacity then was about 2000 barrels a day.

Little by little the company had developed trade with Central America and China. Enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Bill caused the Chinese to desert a favored competitor, and soon Starr & Co. was shipping immense quantities of flour to China.

It then developed a large business with Europe with shipments of flour to Ireland and England, while neglecting to make prompt deliveries to its Chinese customers, and on occasion, supplying them with flour the Chinese considered inferior. The Chinese finally reached the limit of their patience and ceased doing business.

Starr & Co. started a second plant at Wheatport, now part of Crockett. It was to be the biggest flour mill in the world

with a capacity of 8,000 barrels a day. Its massive foundations were an engineering feat. A huge grain warehouse and cleaning plant was completed in 1884. It had a capacity of 150,000 tons of grain with docks capable of accommodating as many as six ships for loading. All the grain received was in sacks weighing about 140 pounds each and handled by barefoot men as shoes would cut the sacks in the lower layers. The flour mill was built more leisurely, with the mill building not equipped for milling wheat until 1891, but its large capacity was never utilized.

Liverpool set the world's price of grain and flour. Starr & Co. shipments to Europe were by sailing ships around the Horn. As competition increased, the business became highly speculative, and less and less profitable. Contracts contained time clauses and late shipments could be refused. Losses due to expiration of time allowances were particularly large in 1893, when due to unusual weather ships were more frequently becalmed.

From 1888 to 1894 Starr & Co. tried to weather the storm by building back its local trade, but in the meantime other firms, including Sperry, had become too firmly

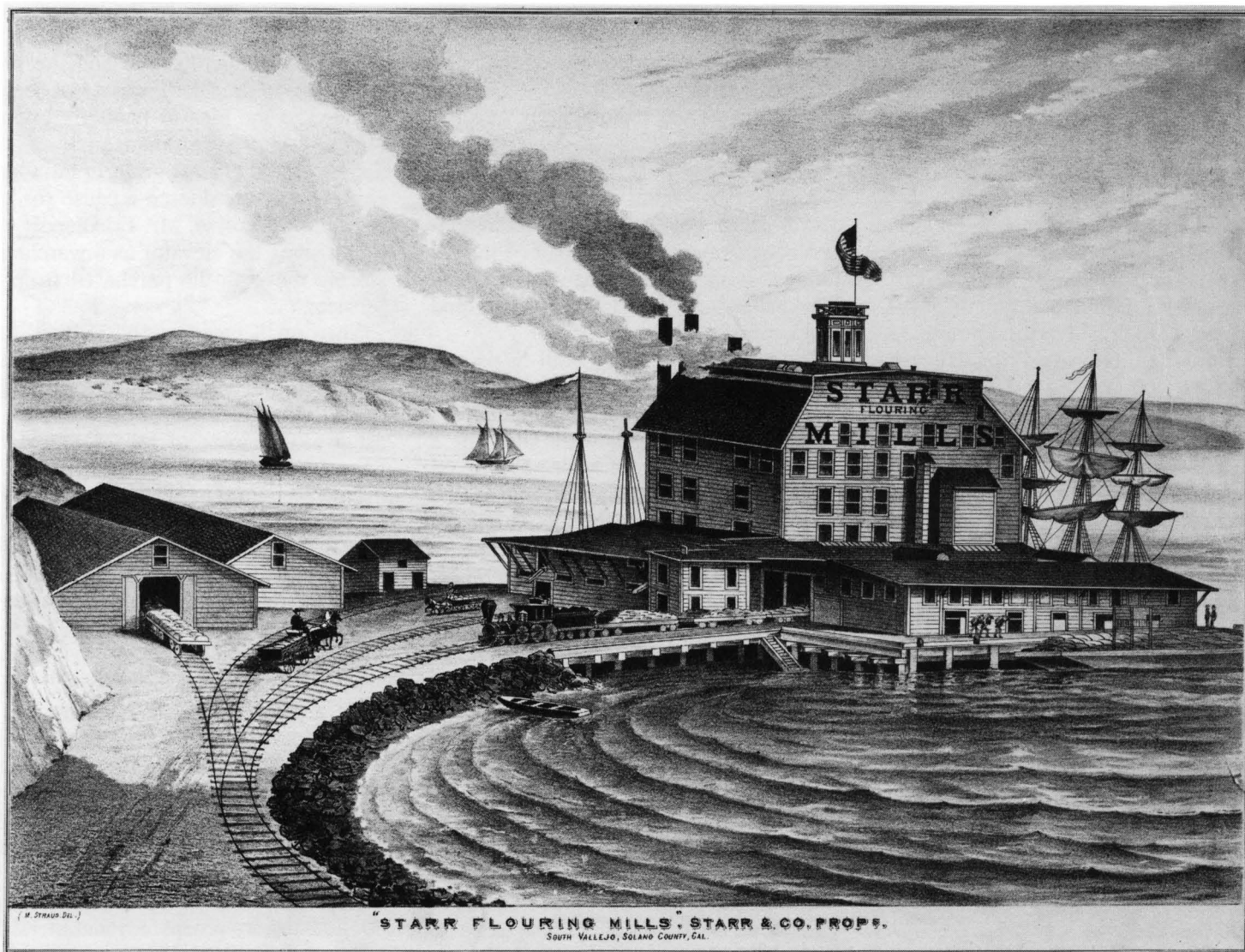
established.

In 1893 came the financial panic which started the great depression of the nineties. Wheat reached the lowest price in the country's history. In 1894 production fell to 23,000,000 bushels, whereas in 1884 and 1886 it had been close to 45,000,000 bushels.

In 1894 Starr & Co. retired from business, renting its mills to Sperry Flour Company for one year. Starr & Co. was bankrupt. A.D. Starr died December 24, 1894.

It is interesting to note that at the time the San Francisco offices of the two rival companies were nearly adjacent to each other. Starr & Co. was at 16 California, Sperry was at 22 California, and Buckeye and Pioneer Flour Mills was in between.

In 1895, just prior to the expiration of the lease, Mr. George W. McNear bought a majority of the stock of Starr & Co. and took over the properties to run in conjunction with his large interests at Port Costa. By this time the Southern Pacific Railroad Co. had built its main line from Suisun City across the marsh to Benicia and was operating the large train ferries to Port Costa. So Port Costa took over and became



the grain port of the West.

McNear also had twenty-five grain warehouses in the interior valley, which with his Port Costa and Wheatport holdings, had a total storage capacity of 8,000,000 bushels.

In 1897 McNear sold the Wheatport plant to a group of California and Hawaiian business men including members of his family. The Mill was converted to a sugar refinery. In 1903 the refinery was shut down and sold to Sugar Factors Company, Ltd. of Honolulu. The mill was converted into a strictly cane sugar refinery and resumed operations in 1906 as California and Hawaiian Sugar Refining Corporation, Ltd., owned by thirty-three producing sugar plantations in the Hawaiian Islands.

Some months after acquiring Starr & Co., Mr. McNear incorporated the Port Costa Milling Co., and with his son Seward B. McNear as president the South Vallejo mills continued to operate until 1910. One change that took place in 1906 was that the machinery of Mill "B" was torn out and replaced by a complete barley-rolling plant and a number of cereal machines. During this time unsuccessful attempts were made to regain the lost China trade. But it was too firmly entrenched in other companies, one of which was Sperry. In 1910 Sperry purchased Starr & Co. whose sale may have been influenced by the death of George McNear December 31, 1909.

Austin Sperry arrived in California in 1852 to search for gold. After back-breaking panning for twenty-three days he decided there were greater riches in providing food for the army of prospectors in the Mother Lode country.

So he erected a mill in Stockton to grind wheat into flour and to provide feed for animals. A fire destroyed his Stockton Mill in 1855, and he was joined by Samuel Baldwin and his cousin, Samuel Sperry, in building a larger mill. At the same time another Sperry, John L., was engaged in building a hotel in the now historic town of Murphys, California Landmark No. 275. The hotel, now known as Murphys Hotel was for years called the Sperry Hotel.

After Austin's death in 1881, his four-children carried on the business. Then a merger with five other mills occurred in 1892. "Sperry Drifted Flour" became a household trade name around the world, first packed in Salinas in 1881.

The sale of the mill in 1910 did not hurt Seward B. McNear. By 1913 he was on the board of directors of Sperry with the title of vice-president. In 1918 when the president, John H. Rossiter, was doing his



The schooner *Champion* was known as the work horse of the sloughs. In this picture she is at Rio Vista load with sacks of grain.

war effort on the United States Shipping Board, McNear was the top manager of all Sperry's activities. Other directors were Hugh Goodfellow, Dunning Rideout, and William Crocker.

In 1914 Sperry began construction on a completely new mill eight stories high, to be completely electrically driven and the largest flour mill in the state. On November 22, 1917, plant superintendent Jesse E. Godley (one of the founders of the Vallejo Rotary Club, and its first president) pulled the slide in a wheat spout to release the first wheat to the grinders.

The December, 1917, issue of "Sperry Family" reported "Mr. John Conway, who packed the first sack of flour at the old Vallejo Mill in 1868, also packed and carried out the first sack of flour in the new Vallejo Mill." He had retired but two years before. This account placed the beginning of the first mill one year earlier than the date listed in Thompson and West's *First Historical Atlas of Solano County*. Another old-timer was H.T. O'Neill who began in 1873 and was still working forty-six years later at age seventy-five.

The war created a huge overseas demand for flour. From 1915 to 1919 the employees at the mills increased from 125 to 363, including fourteen girls largely employed in the laboratory. Twenty-six employees enlisted as soldiers or sailors. None were known to have been killed.

The last cargo of flour shipped by sail-

ing ship was 2,000 tons carried by the *Andrew Welch* in 1916 for Herbert Hoover's Belgium Relief Committee. The flour bags were marked with a special "American Indian" brand. The Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum now has on exhibit one of these bags that was returned skillfully embroidered by Belgium women in appreciation.

In 1917 there was a wheat crop partial failure, while Australia had a huge surplus, having been unable to secure shipping for three years. The United States Government arranged for French ships lingering in the Pacific to escape U-boats to bring Australian wheat to California for milling. Then steamers launched in our shipyards took cargoes of flour through the Panama Canal to feed our allies in Europe. In 1918 ten percent of the flour exported from United States came from California, an importing state.

One of Vallejo's most spectacular fires destroyed the Sperry dock and bins on August 30, 1934. A total of twenty-one bins of grain, 500,000 grain bags and two marine elevators were lost. But a large part of the plant was rebuilt.

In 1929, a number of milling companies in the United States combined to form the corporate structure of General Mills. Sperry's Vallejo Mills was one of these.

Of course the current operations are a far cry from those of 118 years ago. Products are different, containers are different, and chemistry is vital.

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GEORGE DINGLEY AND THE EARLY MILLS OF SOLANO COUNTY

Footnotes

1. See, "Haunted Green Valley Mill Still Echoing Girls Screams," *Daily Republic*, July 13, 1975, p. 10; and "Haunting Tales," *Vacaville Reporter*, October 26, 1986, p. 1C.
2. *Semi-Weekly Solano Herald*, August 19, 1864. The statement in this article that the waterwheel of the mill was "sixty-five feet in diameter--the largest in the United States" is demonstrably in error. Documentary proof of the falsity of this excessive claim was found and the true size was revealed to be an ample enough forty feet in the survey of George Dingley's parcel by T.J. Dewoody, September 1865, showing location of the mill and the placement and size of the water wheel and the tailrace. Survey and report is part of docket of A.M. Comstock and Frederick Repenn v. John D. Bristol, George Dingley, *et. al.*, 7th District Court, No. 704, March 14, 1860.
3. His name does not appear in passenger lists of ships arriving in San Francisco. No genealogical connection has been found with other Dingley surnames prominent in early California history, such as Nathaniel Dingley, who established the Star Mills on I Street in Sacramento in 1850, or Captain Charles L. Dingley, who sailed around the Horn and engaged in flour and lumber business in San Francisco.
4. Solano County Assessment Rolls 1854-1869, Vacaville Heritage Council, Vacaville, California.
5. Sally O'Hara Woodard, "John Frey and the Vallejo Water System," *Solano Historian*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1985, pp. 10-16. Included is a photograph of the falls and a map of the water system built in the 20th century by the City of Vallejo.
6. Solano County Deed, Book G, p 387. It is interesting to note that Charles Pomeroy Stone, Captain, U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers, was founder and first commanding official of the Benicia Arsenal (1851-1856) and later a General in the Union Army in the Civil War, from which he was forced to resign in disgrace. Many years later in 1883, as a civilian, he was chief engineer in charge of the construction of the Statue of Liberty's pedestal on Beldoe's (now Liberty) Island!
7. Robert H. Vance v. George Dingley, 12th Judicial District Court, No. 599, March 1858. Solano County Clerk Records. Vance's land acreage and location was cited in the Solano County 1856 Delinquency Tax List.
8. *loc. cit.* This must have been a year of severe drought because water flows adequately in normal years at this location.
9. *Map of the Eastern Portion of Suscol Rancho*. A.S. Easton, surveyor San Francisco, November 1856. Original in the California State Library. On the map of the City of Vallejo water system reproduced in the *Solano Historian* of December 1985, *loc. cit.*, the site lies midway between the diversion dam and the Green Valley treatment plant.
10. Munro-Fraser, *History of Solano County* (San Francisco: Wood Alley and Co., 1879) pp. 73-74.

11. Jean Bruceward and Gary Kunitz, "Some New Thoughts On An Old Mill," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 2 Summer 1974, pp. 142-145.
12. E.O. Essig, "The Russian Settlement at Ross," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3, September 1933, p. 194.
13. H.H. Bancroft, *History of California*, Vol. 7, p. 84. For discussion of the importance and history of mills and milling see John Storck and Walter Teague, *Flour For Man's Bread: A History of Milling* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1952). See Eric Sloane, "The Mills of Early America," *American Heritage*, Vol. 6, No. 6, October 1955, pp. 104-107 for illustrations of different types of mills.
14. Munro-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-300. Two other mills are cited by Fraser. One, which he describes on page 79 with the note "not yet finished" seems to resemble the description of the "four-run-of-stone flouring mill" which was to be built on Southampton Bay by "Messrs Spaulding and Cook" according to a Benicia item in the *Solano Press* issue of November 13, 1867. The other he describes on page 316 as follows: "the mill lately erected by [J.M. Pleasants of Pleasants Valley]... The motive power is oxen working on a treadwheel. Five of these animals are now used, but these have been found to be inadequate to perform the required tasks; the power, therefore, will be augmented by the addition of others. Everything is ground in this mill, from barley to xxx flour."
15. For full discussion of this important case in the history of California land law see Paul W. Gates, "The Suscol Principle, Preemption, and California Latifundia," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 4, November 1970, pp. 453-471. The author recounts how the influential Vallejo-title holders persuaded Congress to pass a special act on March 3, 1863 granting them preemption rights to as much of their land as "had been reduced to possession." This action sought to forestall the claims of settlers like George Dingley, but the issue was not decided in favor of the former until a Supreme Court decision in 1869, which finally nullified the settlers' claims.
16. George Dingley v. Warren P. Durbin, John Stilts, *et. al.*, 7th District Court, No. 1408, January 1, 1866, Exhibits A and D. It is interesting to note that the testimony in this case also refers to Dingley's earlier mill of 1853. This case was eventually decided in favor of the defendants on January 25, 1871, three and one-half years after Dingley's death!
17. Exhibit A in the case of Dingley v. Durbin cited above. Dingley did not file his final Preemption Application until November 5, 1864, when his "Vallejo" title was being foreclosed in another action.
18. Solano County Deeds, Book N, p. 163. Before the date of the contract with Bristol on April 19, 1858, Dingley engaged in two inexplicable real estate transactions in which he sold his original 64-acre mill of 1853 tract to a John M. Neville, a prominent merchant of Benicia, who later became county sheriff, for a remarkable sum of \$10,500 on July 9, 1855, and thereafter bought it back on April 12, 1858--just seven days before the Bristol deal--for the same inflated price. *loc. cit.*, Book H, p. 490 and Book M p. 114. Neville appears to have been closely associated with Dingley and his milling operations. He was cited by Robert Vance in the suit referred to earlier as having received the flour properly due to Vance. Dingley's financial indebtedness to Neville seem to have affected Neville's role as sheriff in Dingley's and his own interest in the first foreclosure proceedings against Dingley's mill during 1862-65. Neville's partner, J. Roome Lewis, acquired title to the 6.82-acre mill site still in the deceased George Dingley's estate in a second foreclosure sale on February 2, 1868 to clear Dingley's outstanding debt to Neville.
19. This contract was presented as Exhibit A in the case of John O'Connor v. George Dingley, 7th District court, No. 711, September 1, 1860. The testimony in the docket of this case and that of the case cited below supplied much of the detailed information on the nature and progress of the mill construction. Dingley also argued that O'Connor's masonry work was defective and that it cost him \$2,000 to rebuild and repair it.
20. *op. cit.*
21. George Dingley v. John O'Connor, County Court, Solano County, No. 94, January 9, 1860.
22. Solano County Herald, January 17, April 11, June 20, 1863; and March 5, 1864.
23. Great Register, Solano County, September 4, 1867.
24. A.M. Comstock and Frederick Repenn v. John D. Bristol, George Dingley, *et. al.*, 7th District Court, No. 704, March 17, 1860.
25. The inventory and appraisal of George Dingley's estate made on March 26, 1868 includes among his property in Cacheville, Yolo County, a "Brick Flouring Mill," worth \$10,000 and a supplemental inventory dated August 7, 1868 lists an "engine boiler," worth \$3,500. Probate Court, Solano County, California--Estate of George Dingley--File, Solano County Clerk Records. Curiously, in the *History of Yolo County, California* by William O. Russell (Woodland, Calif., 1940) on p. 140 there is the statement that the mill was rented in 1870 to an E.A. Eastham who installed steam machinery.
26. *Sacramento Bee*, September 14, 1867 and *Weekly Solano Herald*, September 20, 1867.

Solano County Historical Society
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